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TO THE THRONE FROM THE SHEEPCOTES

BY
WILLIAM SCHOELER

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"What Think Ye of the Bible"



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TO THE THRONE FROM THE SHEEPCOTES

CHAPTER I.

THE ANOINTING

A madman reigned over Israel!

When the Israelites first left Egypt, judges had, for many years, guided the destinies of their several tribes. However, as time rolled on, they did not find this mode of government altogether satisfactory. One day the elderships of the nation gathered together at Ramah, the home of the prophet Samuel, himself a judge, and desired a king after the fashion of the gentiles who lived round about them.

Samuel was both amazed and indignant at the request, for to him it amounted to a practical rejection of Jehovah. Long and earnestly he remonstrated with the disgruntled people, but they remained dour and proud. He accomplished nothing. After much expostulation and exhortation he had to yield to their demand, and Saul, the son of Kish, a man of great stature and strength, was duly crowned the first king of Israel.

For several years the new ruler acquitted himself nobly. Even Samuel, who had withdrawn from public life, and, in Ramah or Ephraim, conducted a theological school, expressed his satisfaction with Saul's administration.

But soon things took a different turn. Saul became boastful, presumptuous, arrogant, vain and covetous. Samuel warned the king of the displeasure of Jehovah, but the warning was disdained. Saul's conceit and avariciousness waxed greater still. Then one day, at a sacrifice upon Gilgal's height, the prophet publicly and sternly upbraided him in the sight of all his people, repudiated his further reign over Israel, and told him in conclusion that Jehovah would choose himself a man after his own heart.

That had been two years ago. Saul was still on the throne, but, since Jehovah had wholly withdrawn his blessing, his rule had degenerated into abject incompetence. Now and again the king suffered from fits of madness. The people, superstitiously, whispered to one another, that an evil spirit from Jehovah was tormenting him. Under such circumstances the affairs of the nation received but scant attention. Corruption and injustice were in evidence everywhere. Conditions were worse than during the days of Joel and Abijah—the two judges who had lorded it over the nation, and who had been supplanted by the coronation of Saul. In addition to the internal troubles, even greater ones threatened from without. Many neighboring tribes, among them the Philistines, than whom there could be no more implacable foe,

assumed menacing attitudes. Surely, Israel's condition was precarious in the extreme.

Samuel observed all this and grieved and mourned on account of it. His face, which formerly was kind, serene, gentle, now grew overcast with sorrow and gloom. The people saw it and stood in awe. Many cursed the day on which they had asked for a king.

The prophet had spent hours and even days on his knees before Jehovah, praying and making intercession for his people, but so far there had been neither voice nor answer. It had the appearance as though the Lord had forsaken the nation. Samuel had invariably risen from his devotion uncomforted—unrelieved.

But on the day that our story opens, it was different. Jehovah had vouchsafed him a vision. When the prophet rose from his prayer on this particular day, his face was radiant with joy, his eye gleamed with a new light, his entire figure, which had, of late, been drooping with lassitude, stood once more erect as of yore.

Samuel was a new man because Jehovah had permitted him to look into the future. That future had been bright and glorious—as glorious as the promised land which Moses descried from Nebo's height. A rough way led thither; many obstacles were to be overcome; but the goal would be attained. The prophet's inquietude gave place to a great calm. He put on his official robe, filled his horn with oil, told Nathanael his servant that he would be away until the following evening, and then set out to Bethlehem, a little village distant from Ramah about ten miles.

It was noon when he reached this town. Now, although it was not unusual for the prophet to visit particular places, it had not infrequently happened that the occasion for such a visit was the occurrence of something blameworthy in the community. Accordingly, when he appeared in the gate of Bethlehem, the elders of the people were seized with apprehension.

"Comest thou peaceably?" they asked with ill-concealed trepidation.

Samuel smiled at their alarm.

"I come peaceably," he replied. "I desire to sacrifice unto Jehovah: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the high place."

Arrangements for the sacrifice were immediately made. The people were quickly informed, and, three hours later, the smoke of a burning bullock ascended from the altar.

"What has happened to our prophet?" the elders of the people inquired of one another. "Behold his cheerful countenance! Hitherto it was dark with cares, and now we see it beaming with joy. So also his stature. Was it not getting bent with age? How comes it, then, that it is erect again as before?"

When the sacrifice had come to an end, Samuel approached one of the elders and said: "It has grown late. Permit me, I pray you, to stay at your house to-night."

The man whom the prophet had accosted was Jesse, a descendant of Boaz and Ruth—two names held in great esteem by all the children of Israel. The antecedents of Boaz and Ruth were something like this: During the days when judges governed

Israel, a famine visited the land. In consequence of this a certain Elimelech and his family sojourned to Moab. Here Elimelech died, and Naomi his wife was left with her two sons Mahlon and Chilion. These two sons took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelt in Moab about ten years. Then Mahlon and Chilion died. Now when the days of mourning were over, Naomi arose, that she might return to Judah. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and let her depart, but Ruth clave unto her. "Entreat me not to leave thee," she said, "and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: Jehovah do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." To such an appeal Naomi had no words to reply. Ruth went along and later married Boaz, a prominent citizen of Bethlehem. Jesse was the grandson of this Boaz.

At Samuel's request the worthy elder's eyes kindled with delight. He assured the prophet that nothing could afford him more pleasure than to have him lodge in his house.

As they walked home together, Samuel, after some minutes of meditation, said: "Jehovah has chosen one of your sons for his service, and I have come to anoint him."

Jesse looked up surprised, but not displeased.

"Which one is it, my lord?" he asked.

"I do not know," Samuel answered, thoughtfully. "Jehovah has not yet revealed him unto me. Now

therefore do what I charge you: let your sons pass before me one by one, that the Lord may show me who it is."

"As you command, my lord," Jesse replied, secretly wondering whereunto Jehovah might have called one of his sons. He surmised, however, that Samuel might have reference to the school of the prophets which he conducted in Ramah, and for which he constantly solicited scholars. Of course, he should have liked to get more specific information, but as the prophet did not seem to care to go into particulars, he did not consider it becoming to ask questions.

Arrived at his residence, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass successively before Samuel. First came the handsome and stately Eliab, Jesse's first-born. The prophet looked at him with undisguised admiration. He seemed to be struck with the natural nobleness and majesty of the young man's appearance, but, to the astonishment of Jesse, he did not anoint him.

After Eliab, the eldest, Abinadab, the second son, passed before the prophet. He, too, was of fine personal appearance, but he was not chosen. Then came the third son; then the fourth; then the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh. Samuel did not pour the anointing oil upon any one of them. When Jesse looked astounded at this, the prophet softly shook his head and said: "Jehovah has not chosen any of them. Are these all your children?"

"There remains yet the youngest," his host replied despondently. "But he is not here. I charged him to stay in the field to keep the sheep."

"I pray you, send and fetch him," the prophet begged. "I must see him."

Jesse immediately sent for his youngest son. Notwithstanding, he secretly smiled a disapproving smile. What did the prophet want with the stripling who was left? If some special work had to be performed, was not Eliab or Abinadab much better qualified to accomplish it?

When the youngest son came home from the field, he was without delay hurried into the presence of Samuel. The other sons had taken great care to make themselves presentable before they passed before the prophet. This one was not given time to do so. Direct from the sheepcotes he was haled into the chamber where the seer awaited his coming.

"This is David my youngest son," Jesse said, introducing the lad to Samuel.

The prophet looked up and beheld a lad of about twenty-five years of age. He was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance. Auburn hair fell in heavy locks from his well-shaped head, and rich brows shaded a pair of bright honest eyes. Samuel was strangely moved. He noticed with pleasure the modest blush that served to increase the handsomeness and pleasantness and innocence of the youth. Before Jesse had time to realize the situation, the prophet had whisked from his girdle a vial of oil.

"Kneel!" he commanded David.

The lad, stricken with awe, obeyed the behest, whereupon Samuel forthwith poured on his head the entire contents of his vial. Jesse saw it and shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. He began

seriously to doubt the psychological penetration of him who once had judged Israel.

When Samuel left on the following morning, he instructed David to make it a point to see him in Ramah occasionally. The young man promised to do so. He had been strangely affected when the prophet had poured the oil on his head. What did it mean? What was the work to which the Lord had called him? His father, whom he asked about it, could give him no information.

Already the next week he repaired to Samuel, who gave him a hearty welcome. All day long the prophet conversed with the shepherd lad. He found a very attentive, intelligent, and appreciative listener.

David was of a contemplative nature. He was given to fancies and dreams. On that account his father, who was of a more realistic turn of mind, treated him somewhat unfairly. The youngest children are commonly the fondlings of the family. In the case of David it was different. He occupied a position almost similar to that of a menial rather than son. Thus, when Samuel had come to Bethlehem, David had to remain with the sheep in the field, though it was a time of sacrifice and feasting.

But the lad did not mind. He loved the hills and the valleys. Out in the open fields he would play on his harp, and sing to his flock hymns composed by himself. When he grew tired of playing and singing, he would practice with his sling. He did nothing by halves. In time he acquired such proficiency in these two arts that people began to talk of him. His skill in the use of the sling was so perfect that he could project a stone even at a very

small object with unerring certainty. His harp, though but a tiny instrument, gave forth wonderfully melodious strains. As for his voice, it was mellow, full and sweet.

He had not seen much of the written records of his nation, but he had known, in his boyhood and youth, an old man who had seen with his own eyes the exploits of Samson, the Hebrew Hercules. When this old man related the feats of the giant, David would listen, lost in admiration and wonder, whilst his eyes flashed fire, and his bosom heaved with great emotion. In the conversation with Samuel he could not refrain from referring to Samson and calling him one of Israel's greatest men.

The prophet smiled.

"Samson was great," he conceded. "But mark it well: all outward strength is perishable. Physical power is the most rudimentary and imperfect form of strength. A strong body, if it encase a weak spiritual nature, is pathetically pitiable. The time will come when men will look not on bulk, strength, stature, bow and shield, but upon godliness, good actions, noble benefactions. The day will come when all outward power and pomp shall be considered vanity, and the soul alone be valiant for its attainments of the highest love."

The shepherd youth listened in great surprise when the prophet thus spoke to him. He had never heard the like before. Samuel perceived that David desired to hear more.

"Yes, my son," he continued, "there is too much strength in our day that is only outward. There is too much greatness that is only bragadocio. Men make too much of the achievements of bone and

muscle. It has become the custom to judge by outward appearances. But outward appearances often deceive. We must all learn to see that true beauty is beauty of the heart; that true greatness is greatness of the mind; that true abiding majesty is moral majesty; that what a man is in reality he is in his soul! Mark it well: the bloom shall be taken off the cheek; the lustre shall dim in the eye; the sap shall be taken out of the bodily strength: moral elements, spiritual qualities, spiritual beauties—these alone shall survive all wrecks; these alone shall grow, increase in brilliance, radiance, and worth; these alone, because they partake of the nature and quality of Jehovah, shall abide through the ages of eternity."

Thus Samuel talked all day long to David, whose soul was powerfully affected by the old man's counsel and advice. When he returned home a different spirit seemed to have entered into his person. He saw everything in a new light.

The prophet was right. When David thought of his ancestors he found Samuel's words substantiated on every hand. The history of Boaz and Ruth confirmed all the prophet had said. They had not become renowned on account of their strength: their benevolences, their godliness, had made for them a name in Israel. But force, when divorced from piety, had always come to ruin in the end.

He sat down on a stone to rest a while. When he looked around his eyes shone with rapture. How full of meaning was every spot that his view took in! To his left rose the dark wall of Moab, frowning over the lake near which the wicked cities Sodom and Gomorrah were engulfed after they were consumed

by the fire of heaven. In the distance, east of Mamre, he could descry the plot of land which Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite, in order that Sarah his wife might be buried in the cave which was at the end of the partly timbered field. This cave had afterwards become the sepulchre of Abraham, Rebekah, Isaac, Leah and Jacob. He had often frequented the place and meditated there for hours. In the stony fields of Bethlehem, close by his daily haunts, one solitary pillar marked the place where Jehovah spake to Jacob, and another the site where poor Rachel died. Far away, in the dark ranges of Moab, his eyes beheld a lofty peak which was known as the spot whence Moses had had his view of the land of promise, and Balaam his vision of a wondrous star that was to arise out of Jacob. What was the meaning of that star? He had often thought of it, but had found no answer. A sceptre was to rise out of Israel that should smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Seth. For the first time a king was reigning in Israel. Was Saul that sceptre? He had seen him a couple of times, and had been impressed with his person. His brothers, too, spoke highly of him. They had fought in his ranks when Nahash the Ammonite had been discomfited. They had seen Saul fight and were full of praise. Would Saul altogether deliver Israel?

Alas, Saul had become proud and overbearing. He had misused his power. He had begun to oppress the people. He had disregarded the commandment of Jehovah, and Samuel had, upon the high place of Gilgal, pronounced upon him God's displeasure and curse, at the same time declaring

that the kingdom should be wrested out of his hands. Now it was rumored abroad, that in consequence of this scene on Gilgal's height, the king had been troubled with fits of moodiness and dejection, which sometimes culminated in sheer madness.

"Poor king!" David soliloquized and rose from his stone. No, Saul was not the star. He recalled the words of the prophet with reference to outward appearance. Had Samuel been thinking of Saul when he spoke those words?

When David came home both his parents and brothers were curious as to what Samuel had told him. Eliab grinned when David rehearsed his conversation with the prophet. He could not understand the enthusiasm of his brother. What was he enthused about? But then, David always had been subject to silly fancies. Now he would become worse. Perhaps he would some of these days altogether join the sons of the prophets. He shrugged his shoulders and went away. What did he care. If David found it to his liking to sing psalms and mumble prayers, he was welcome to it. He, Eliab, had higher ambitions. He was mighty glad that Samuel had not poured that vial of oil on his head. Pooh!

CHAPTER II.

THE WONDERFUL HARPER

In the royal palace in Gibeah of Benjamin men talked but in whispers. For several days the king had been moody and out of sorts. It was dangerous to be near him. There was no telling what Saul might do. His illness had taken on very serious aspects. There were regular spasms. Sometimes he would sit for hours and meditate without stirring a finger. Presently he would start. A terrible stare would come into his eyes. He would leap from his chair and pace to and fro in his room as if mad. Foam would issue from his mouth and now and again he would rave and exclaim.

The queen was greatly distressed. Could no one help? Was there no man in the kingdom who knew of a remedy? Already news of the king's affliction had come to the knowledge of the Philistines, ancient and implacable enemies of Israel, and they had begun to levy troops for what everybody realized to be no friendly purpose.

Upon a day when the king's malady threatened each minute to culminate again in a frenzy of fury, a groom approached Jonathan, the crown prince, and did obeisance.

Jonathan, Saul's eldest son, was about thirty years of age. He was of an impetuous nature, full of courage and daring, honest to the core, a picture of manhood and strength. More than once he had distinguished himself in battle, and turned defeat

into victory. The whole nation loved him passionately and spoke well of him.

"What is it?" he asked of the groom.

"I have been thinking of the king my lord," the lad replied with some hesitancy.

"Well?" There was encouragement in Jonathan's look.

"I think I know what would help the king."

"You?" the prince exclaimed incredulously.

"Well, say on."

"Music!" the boy answered laconically.

"Music?"

"Yes, my lord, music. In Bethlehem of Judah I once heard a young man play on a harp. It was just wonderful. He enchanted me and everybody else who listened. I never heard the like again. When that lad played a hush as of death fell upon the people, many men and women wept. Under the spell of his strains the care-stricken forgot their cares, those who were in agony their pains, those who were gloomy the things that made them distraught. His instrument pleads and beseeches, exults and wails; notes arise and fall like winged birds; they caress and whisper; they rouse and intoxicate. I am sure that if he were here, the king would quickly have relief."

Jonathan regarded the eloquent boy with undisguised admiration.

"I shall think the matter over," he said kindly.

The prince went to his mother and told her of the suggestion of his groom.

"Where is the young man?" the queen asked.

"Shall I get him?"

"Yes, please."

The lad was called. He repeated to the queen what he had said to Jonathan.

"Do you think you could find the harper in Bethlehem and bring him hither?" the queen inquired.

"I am sure I could."

"Then go and get him at once. Tell him to make haste!"

The groom departed immediately, and, on the evening of the next day, returned with the son of Jesse.

David had been very much astonished at the sudden summons. So were his parents and brothers. That David's fame as a musician should have penetrated to the ears of the royal family, almost took away their breath. They urged him to make haste. It could only react favorably upon them if David was making himself useful in Gibeah.

When the shepherd lad arrived he was forthwith conducted into the presence of the queen. She was a woman who in her youth must have been of extraordinary beauty, for she was still very handsome. At her side were her two daughters Merab and Michal. Merab, the eldest, was about twenty-four years of age, and without physical attractions; Michal had just celebrated her twentieth birthday, and was the image of her mother.

The queen's eye surveyed the young man's figure with a benevolent glance. The lad pleased her instantly. She liked his intelligent, open, artless face.

"We have heard of your skill upon the harp," she said sweetly. "Would you mind playing us a selection or two?"

David bowed politely and unwrapped the instrument which he had carried under his arm. His

fingers glided softly over the responsive strings. After a short prelude he played a wonderfully captivating melody. When he had finished, a deadly silence reigned in the room. The queen and her daughters had listened as though bewitched. Presently the door opened and Jonathan entered.

"That was excellent!" he cried. "Too bad that I heard but the concluding strains. Please, let us have that same tune once more."

"Yes, yes!" both the queen and Jonathan's sisters declared. "It was wonderful."

"I have composed words to the melody I played," David remarked quietly. "If the queen desires it, I shall sing them."

"Yes, pray, do so!"

David sang. A voice full and mellow chanted to the accompaniment of the harp the following lines:

"Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want.
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
 He leadeth me beside the still waters.
 He restoreth my soul;
 He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for
 his name's sake.
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;
 Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.
 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence
 of mine enemies:
 Thou hast anointed my head with oil;
 My cup runneth over.

Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah forever."

The sound of both music and song died slowly away. The effect had been overwhelming. The women were softly sobbing, and even Jonathan's eyes were moist. He walked up to David.

"You are an artist!" he said. "Did you really compose this yourself?"

"Yes; I did it quite recently when herding the sheep of my father's."

"Who is your father?"

"Jesse, a descendant of Boaz and Ruth."

"Ah! And what is your name?"

"David."

"Here is my hand, David. Let us be friends!"

The harper hesitated. He looked with surprise into the face of the king's son.

"Well?" Jonathan said with a reassuring smile.

Quite timidly David took the hand of the prince.

A servant entered.

"What is it?" the queen inquired anxiously.

"The king is very ill!" the man reported.

The queen hurried away.

"Terrible, terrible!" Jonathan murmured. "David, let us pray Jehovah that your music will give relief to my father the king. My mother the queen will shortly return and then we shall try your harp. In the meantime meet my sisters Merab and Michal."

David acknowledged each introduction with a profound bow. When he stood before Michal, his heart fluttered with a sensation perfectly novel to him. When he looked into the eye of the princess,

a thrill went through his soul. He was almost unable to hide his emotion. The beauty of the maiden had impressed him the moment he had crossed the threshold. Even when he played he bestowed upon her more than one secret glance. He had noticed that every time he looked at her she had likewise gazed at him. Now that he stood directly before her he found it difficult to conceal his confusion.

The queen returned.

"He is very ill!" she replied to the questioning looks of her children. "Come, David, let us try your harp. May Jehovah bless your skill."

Jonathan, David, and the queen repaired to the chamber of the king. Saul was lying on a divan. He was quite calm now from exhaustion. A short while ago a violent spasm had seized upon him. Then he had raged like a mad man. Now he lay there without spirit and strength, watched by two physicians and four strong men.

The chamber was quite spacious. The queen placed David in one of the farthest corners and beckoned him to play. The young man obeyed. His heart was touched with the misery of the king. If his music could afford any help, he was willing to do his best. He breathed to Jehovah a sigh for succor and aid. Then his fingers glided softly over the strings of the instrument. A strain like a prayer floated through the room, first melancholy and sad, then growing hopeful and confident, and, at last, culminating in sure expectancy and trust.

Every person in the chamber was enraptured. Such music had never been heard before. All eyes were riveted in wonderment upon the skillful

harper. Even upon the king the melodious chords had told. The wildness of his countenance had given way to serenity and peace. His eyes had ceased their furious rolling. Slowly the big, heavy lashes had closed over them.

"More of this!" he said when David stopped. The queen and Jonathan exchanged a quick glance. They motioned David to play another selection. The shepherd lad struck up another tune, soft and tender as the first, but more joyful, jubilant, victorious.

Saul slowly rose to a sitting posture. He passed his hand over his forehead, which was wet with perspiration. He looked in the direction whence the music had come.

"Draw near!" he addressed the harper. When David stood by his side he shook his hand and said: "Receive my thanks! Your playing has soothed my nerves. You shall play before me every day."

"You wrought a miracle," the king's son said to David, when they both had left the chamber. "Your music is marvelous! Come, you must play for us some more!"

"How is father?" Jonathan's sisters asked the prince when he returned with David.

"Relieved for today," the prince replied. "Rejoice with me, for David's harp has accomplished wonder. Father got well immediately. Just think of it, he wants David every day."

The queen returned. Michal flew toward her.

"Is it true, mother," she asked, "that father is well?"

"Yes, my child," the queen answered radiantly, "father is better than he has been for many weeks."

"And David—I mean this young man, did it with his harp?"

"Yes, Michal, David did it with his harp."

The princess looked at her mother with thoughtful eyes. Presently she said: "I should like to learn to play on that instrument too."

David's blood began to tingle. His eyes glistened with delight.

"Why, yes, my daughter," he heard the queen remark. "If David be willing to teach you. It appears he will stay a long while with us, for the king has taken a fancy to him. He wants him to play every day."

Michal cast an inquiring glance at the shepherd lad. Would he be willing to give her lessons? David blushed at the look of the princess. To hide his embarrassment he made a profound bow.

"I am your obedient servant," he stammered. "The king's daughter needs but to command."

"Then we shall begin tomorrow," Michal decided.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE ROYAL COURT

That night David could not sleep. He had experienced too much in one day. From the sheepcotes he had been called to serve in the king's palace, and here in the king's palace he had almost instantaneously won the friendship of Jonathan, whom the whole nation loved. In addition, he had made a good impression upon both the king and the queen,

and, best of all, Michal, the princess, had asked him to be her teacher.

David's soul was swimming in a sea of happiness. Michal! What a wonderful maiden! He had never in all his life seen a woman of as noble a carriage. And he was to be her tutor—was to be near her every day! His blood flowed faster at the mere thought of it. His brain was active already in composing a sonnet in her honor.

But stop! Who was he to busy himself about the daughter of the king? What right had he, a shepherd lad, to get excited over a princess?

"David, David," he said to himself, "don't be foolish! Stay on the earth, young man. Don't soar too near the sun lest he burn your wings and you fall to your death!"

The young man sighed. What a misfortune that Michal was the daughter of Saul! He honestly confessed to himself that he loved her. How would he be able to conceal his agitation when day after day he instructed the princess?

Oh, what misery—what sweet misery had he fallen into! Heretofore his life had been so placid, so even; to-day he had experienced the first great mental storm. He was shaken to the very foundations of his being. How would it all end?

Had David been aware that the princess in question was also lying awake and thinking of him, his happiness would have known no bounds. Michal had been powerfully affected by the youth from Bethlehem. For a while she tried to persuade herself that it was the harp—the melody—the singing—that kept her awake. But she was too candid to deceive herself long. What was the harp without

the musician? What was the tune without the voice that sang it? No—no: it was not the harp that banished sleep from her eyes; it was not the music that troubled her mind. It was the man, the man!

As Saul's daughter realized the truth she sobbed. What now? Oh, that David were some other man—that David were Paltiel!

Paltiel was a prominent captain. He had served the king more than ten years already, and Saul regarded him as his right hand. Paltiel had cast his eye upon Michal and was resolved to make her his wife. Upon a convenient day he had asked the king for the hand of his child, and Saul had graciously listened to his suit. Paltiel was a worthy officer. The man had made himself almost indispensable. Why should he not become his son-in-law? After a few minutes' deliberation the king grasped the hand of his servant and granted his request.

But here a difficulty arose. When he had told Michal of the transaction, the girl had become white as a sheet.

"Father!" she had cried, "Father! give me time! Grant me a little respite! Do not marry me yet!"

The king had been moved by the distress of his child. Michal was his pet. He had pressed her to his bosom and assured her that there was no hurry.

That was three months ago. The king had not found it in his heart to force her into the arms of his servant. But Paltiel had not been idle. Confident in the support of the king, he had openly wooed the princess. But Michal had greeted him with eyes of steel. She had avoided him wherever she

could, and Paltiel was suffering all the tortures of a spurned lover.

Thus matters stood when David arrived in Gibeah. His appearance upon the scene constituted a new argument for her to put off the marriage with Paltiel. A new affection had entered her soul. There was absolutely no room left for the picture of any other man. Now that she had seen David, she had rather drown herself than become the wife of Paltiel! There was something within her that simply revolted at the thought of calling that man her husband.

She loved David! She hid her face in her pillow when she confessed that fact to herself. But there was no mistake about it—she loved him.

But who was David? A mere shepherd lad! Could the chasm be bridged?

David remained two full months at the king's court. Day after day he stood before Saul and played and sang. The effect was remarkable. The king grew calmer and calmer. He was able to give his attention again to the affairs of the realm. It was a good thing, too, that such was the case, for the Philistines assumed a threatening attitude. Distinct news came to Gibeah that they were marshalling a strong army to invade Israel. At this intelligence Saul got busy, too. The Philistines were a strong people. Every precaution must be taken to meet them with a well-equipped force. Accordingly, he sent messengers throughout the nation to levy troops everywhere.

Meanwhile David instructed Michal. The princess practiced two hours each day. She proved very teachable. After two weeks already she was able

to play a few charming selections. The longer she played the more she perfected herself. It was a veritable pleasure to listen when she and her teacher played together.

David's love for Michal waxed stronger every day. He had to be on his guard not to betray himself. Night after night he lay awake and mused. It seemed to him that the goal was fixed too high. He would never be able to attain it. And yet when a new day began to dawn new hope stirred in his breast.

He learned, in time, of Paltiel's intentions. At first this news had given him a rude shock. Later he had perceived that Michal frowned upon the advances of the officer, whereat he had taken courage again. It almost had the appearance as though Paltiel was jealous of him.

Repeatedly David thought to have seen in the eyes of the princess an expression at once mystifying and wistful. In such moments he had experienced a thrilling sensation. Why did Michal regard him thus? Did she love him in return? There were moments when he was bold enough to believe so.

Saul had three more sons whom we have not met yet—Ishbosheth, Ishvi, and Malchishua. Ishbosheth was a cripple. Though twenty-three years of age, his strength was about that of a little child. He was also of weak mind. His mentality had not increased since he had passed his sixth or seventh year.

David's heart overflowed with sympathy for the afflicted prince. On perceiving that Ishbosheth liked music and song, he made it a point to play a piece or two daily for his especial delight. The

poor cripple showed his gratification by clapping his hands and rolling his eyes. He became very much attached to David.

Ishvi and Malchishua were fifteen and seventeen respectively. They were of a rather sportful nature. Whenever they could play anyone a trick, they would do it. Saul often had to upbraid them for their pranks. Ever and anon he had to tell them that it was getting time they acted a little more sedately.

David by and by became their hero. They had soon found out the skill of the shepherd lad in the use of the sling. Now David must teach them too. Every day they slung stones at a mark, until, in time, they became nearly as clever as their instructor.

Thus David made friends of all. He got so used to the life he was leading, that he thought he could never again put up with anything else. But bliss on this earth is never enduring. The sun does not always shine. Presently a storm may arise and dark clouds sweep across the firmament.

Thus it happened to David. One day, when he had stood before the king and played, his royal benefactor took his hand and said: "My son, I may not detain you any longer. Your elder brothers have been called into the field, and your father is left without help. Go back in peace to your sheepcotes. Herd again the sheep of your father's, and may Jehovah be with you and bless you!"

David was stunned at first. So his dream was coming to an end! Fool that he was to believe himself somebody! Fool that he was to have lifted his eyes to a princess of Israel! All he was good

for was to herd sheep! His brothers could gird themselves and fight against the Philistines: he, the least of his father's sons, must abide upon the field with the dumb beasts!

A great bitterness welled up in his soul. He was being sent away—with thanks, yes; but he was being sent away! Would he ever see Michal again? Very probably not, for under what pretext should he be able to approach her? Oh, misery, misery! And now Paltiel would marry her! David groaned. He wished he had never seen the princess. The arrow had penetrated too deeply into his soul. He knew it most assuredly: no power on earth could draw it out any more. To extract it would mean to tear his heart.

How would Michal receive the news? Would she grieve a little for him? In a half dazed condition David staggered to his chamber to wrap his few things together for his return home.

"What is it, David?" a voice suddenly cried. "I have been looking for you everywhere."

It was Jonathan who had entered the room unawares.

"I am going to leave you," the shepherd lad replied, trying to look cheerful.

"Leave us? But why?"

"All my brothers have been drafted into the war against the Philistines, and my father is hard pressed for help. The king has just dismissed me from his service."

"Alas! That is too bad! We shall surely miss you."

"Truly?"

"How can you ask such a question?" Jonathan

chided. He regarded his friend with searching eyes and saw the lines of pain in his face. "You grieve?" he added, putting his hand on the young man's shoulder.

David's eyes became humid. He looked away and said: "You were all so kind to me. I shall never forget you."

"There, there!" Jonathan replied. Then, following a sudden impulse, he threw his arms about the neck of David and pressed him warmly to his bosom. "We are friends, David, aren't we?" he pleaded softly.

David returned the embrace and sobbed.

"When are you going?" Jonathan asked.

"Immediately."

"Humpf! Can't you stay a day longer?"

"No, Jonathan, let me depart. It is better so," he added quickly.

Jonathan surveyed his friend with a thoughtful look. It had the appearance as though he were going to ask a question, but he checked himself and merely said: "Then go in peace. May Jehovah bless you. When the war is over we shall meet again. I shall then speak to my father to call you to remain at Gibeah."

"Oh, Jonathan!"

"Yes, I shall do so. But now come with me to my mother and my sisters. I know they will all be very sorry at your leaving us."

An hour later David was riding home on a mule, which the king had graciously given him for the services rendered. The royal family saw him depart with regrets. Even Ishbosheth showed signs of distress. He seemed to realize that he was losing

a genuine friend. As for Ishvi and Malchishua, they seemed to be disturbed for the first time in their lives.

When David said adieu to the princess, he divined her secret. Michal's hand had trembled quite perceptibly in his. Their eyes met. In the look they exchanged there had been mutual recognition and mutual confession. Forgetting himself and his position, David had pressed the hand of the princess with sudden force and warmth. When it was done he felt like an abject criminal. An expression of terror had come into his eyes. What, if he had been mistaken? What, if Michal drew away from him in surprise and anger? No, he had read correctly. The princess at once responded to the pressure and returned the token. David's heart was transported with bliss. He now knew for a certainty that Michal loved in return.

CHAPTER IV.

LONELY VIGILS

When David arrived home he found that there was much work for him to do. The large herds of sheep and oxen and asses had to be tended to. It was next to impossible to get enough servants. The manhood of the country had been called upon to war against the Philistines.

David discharged his tasks with skill and circumspection. Jesse saw it, and began to be proud of

his son. In this time of need, the lad acquitted himself like a man.

Many a night had David spent upon the open plain, watching the several flocks. This, to David, meant nothing disagreeable. Rather, it was altogether to his taste. When all was calm and quiet, and the stars spangled the sky above, he was able to dream of his love. Now and again he would reach for his harp, his hands would glide over the strings, and the instrument would pour forth its melodies of love and faith and hope.

At such times he would also reflect upon his anointing, months ago, at the hand of Samuel, and ponder over it long and seriously. It surprised him that the prophet had never referred to it again. He touched upon grave and important questions, but the anointing he had not seen fit to mention or to explain. What might it signify?

As David meditated on some of the anointings that had taken place in the history of his nation, he perceived the rite to be full of meaning. Symbolically, it had served as a sign of dedication, as when the patriarch Jacob poured oil upon the pillar at Bethel, or when the Tabernacle of Jehovah was sanctified with the holy oil, or when priests were consecrated by anointing. Metaphorically, it signified divine selection for some particular service or blessing.

Was he to serve God in a special way? Was he to be the instrument of Jehovah in a great undertaking still in the womb of the future? Was his work accomplished already in that he had soothed the nerves of the king?

It was hardly probable that the anointing meant

only the latter service. He did not see why Samuel should have surrounded the matter with such an air of mystery. No, he was called to do or become something else. But what might it be?

Much as he mused, David found no answer. He concluded, at the next opportunity, to frankly ask Samuel himself for the explanation. He longed to call on the prophet anyway. There were so many things he wished to talk over with him. Samuel was wise. His experience was large. No one better than he would be able to counsel him with reference to Michal.

Thus the hours of his lonely vigils were spent in reveries and dreams.

However, a shepherd's life was not without its dangers. Quite frequently beasts of prey came to ravage the sheepecotes. One night David had occasion to show his mettle. As he kept his lonely watch, his thoughts were all of a sudden disturbed by an ensuing commotion amongst his flock. The whole herd withdrew in evident terror from some object yet invisible to him. Closer and closer they huddled together at the western corner of the fold, whilst sheep and lambs bleated in fear and distress, and his faithful dog bounced into the opposite direction and barked furiously.

David now heard in the direction where his dog had disappeared a noise as though an attempt were being made to break through the fence. At the same time an angry growl was heard. But almost simultaneously a crash followed and a huge monster plunged through the palisade, assailed by the watchdog, but not disconcerted. Swiftly it approached the terror-stricken herd.

David had drawn his shepherd's knife. Without a moment's hesitation he boldly ran after the rude intruder, but, before he was able to reach him, the latter had gained the flock and seized a lamb. The poor thing bleated distressfully. Its dam, beside itself with frenzy, made a lunge at the robber to deliver its young. The brute, which David had by this time recognized to be an immense bear, growled angrily, dropped its prey, and hugged its mother tightly to its hairy chest.

Now David reached the spot. Burning with sympathy for the poor sheep, he slashed at the beast of prey and buried his formidable weapon deeply in its side. The bear snarled hideously, wheeled about, clutched the sheep still tighter to its breast with one paw, and struck fiercely at the youth with the other like a man. But David, dexterously, avoided the strokes. In quick succession he inflicted wound after wound upon the monster, until the paw that clutched the prey relaxed its hold upon the now dead sheep, and the enormous brute fell over upon the earth a corpse. The lamb, badly bruised, was still alive.

When on the next morning David showed the carcass of the bear to the servants of his father's, the men were amazed. They told and retold the adventure everywhere. Soon the whole vicinity talked of the valor of the son of Jesse.

Jesse himself had been thrown into no little excitement. For a while, whenever it happened that David had to be out on a night-watch, he insisted upon it that a servant accompanied him. The lad, smilingly, acknowledged the attention and concern of his father's, but as days and weeks passed with-

out another visit from a beast of prey, he concluded, one night, to go out alone. The men were scarce, and the shepherd youth who was to go with him, looked so tired.

As chance would have it, that very night the sheepfold was raided again. This time it was a lion. By the light of the moon, which was brightly shining, David saw the king of the animals leap over the fence and survey the frightened flock.

The beast was of colossal dimensions. It stopped in close proximity to the herd and serenely wagged its tail. Suddenly it crouched. It must have discovered what it desired. Now it jumped into the midst of the terrified flock and seized upon a tender lamb. David felt his heart go out in sympathy to the suffering animal. With his lance ready for a thrust, he bravely confronted the brute, who regarded his approach with what seemed to be astonishment. The daring youth, however, did not give it time to reflect or, still less, escape. Mustering all the force at his command, he buried the deadly instrument deeply in the body of the robber. The shaft of the lance broke in two from the impact. Quick as lightning the shepherd lad reached for his short sword, and, grasping the beast by its beard, sunk the blade to the very hilt three times in its chest. The lion dropped the lamb, which, though mangled, was still living, fell over and weltered in his blood, filling the air with roars of agony.

The surprise of the shepherds on the next day knew no bounds. Henceforth David's position was established. Everybody called him a mighty man of valor. Notwithstanding, Jesse no more per-

mitted him to watch the sheep alone. He could not afford to have a son like David devoured by beasts of the field.

CHAPTER V.

"HOPE AND WAIT!"

About a month and a half after his return from the service of the king, David found time to go to Ramah.

The prophet had just finished his morning meal, when his youthful friend entered his chamber. He was visibly delighted. Knowing that David was back in Bethlehem, he had been expecting a visit from him almost any day.

"I am very glad that you have come," he greeted the shepherd. "It is about four months since you were under my roof."

"I have been kept very busy, father," the lad replied. "Though my heart longed to see you, I was not able to come sooner."

"So you have thought of me?" said the old seer, and his face beamed with paternal joy.

"Yes, father, I have often thought of you. Many a time have I craved your counsel and advice."

"Speak on," the prophet invited. "What have you been doing?"

David related in order all that had occurred. Samuel listened with great attention. At the description of the affliction of the king, a tear of pity

stole into his kindly eyes. He thought of what might have been if Saul had not rejected Jehovah.

"I am glad," he said, "that the Lord blessed your harp. It is an evil spirit who torments the king. Alas, that Saul has gone his own ways and disdained the commandments of God! Mark it, my son, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding. But proceed."

David now portrayed every member of the royal household. When he set forth the splendid qualities of Jonathan, and mentioned the friendship that obtained between the prince and himself, the prophet nodded approvingly.

"Yes, yes," he agreed, "Jonathan is a godly youth. May Jehovah bless him!" Having said so the prophet reclined in his chair and fell into a deep reverie. He wondered why the Lord had rejected the whole house of Saul. Was not Jonathan a noble prince? Did not the entire nation love him? Would he not have made an exemplary king? Why, then, had Jehovah repudiated also him? Samuel was unable to fathom the ways of God. He roused himself.

"You have not yet referred to Michal," he said, questioningly. "Does she still take after the queen?"

David now characterized also the princess, but his voice, hitherto so full and steadfast, grew more and more uncertain. The prophet noticed it and closely perused his face.

"What is it, my son?" he asked with tender solicitude.

David examined the face before him. Scores of times he had resolved to tell the prophet all his grief, and now he found it so extremely difficult.

It was no small thing to speak of his love. Still, the gentle eyes of the worthy prophet dispelled his diffidence and reserve. He made his mind up in an instant.

"Father," he began with quavering voice, "I have a confession to make to you."

"Say on, my son," Samuel nodded encouragingly.

"I love Michal!" David blurted.

Now it was out. The lad was scared at his own confession and almost regretted to have divulged his secret. He expected that Samuel would jump from his chair in consternation, but, to his nameless surprise, nothing of the kind took place. His aged friend and teacher remained perfectly tranquil.

"Well, what next?" he queried complacently.

David doubted his eyes and ears.

"What next?" he cried excitedly. "Why, it is madness for me to believe that there is any hope. Just think of it: Michal, Saul's daughter, and I, a poor shepherd lad! How fill the gulf that separates us?"

The prophet retained his composure. He absolutely disregarded what seemed to be an insurmountable difficulty to David.

"And Michal?" he asked quietly. "Does Michal love you?"

"Yes," David affirmed confidently, and related everything that served to substantiate that fact, not forgetting the handshake at parting.

"Then all is well," Samuel remarked simply.

"All is well?" the youth ejaculated. "Why, father, I do not understand you. How can all be well, considering the lowliness of my position, and the high estate of her I love?"

The prophet reflected. Was it time to tell David the real meaning of his anointing? Was it time to show the lad the work whereunto Jehovah had called him? His soul communed with God. He thought no moment more opportune than this moment. Awaiting a favorable reply, he listened with his inner ear to what Jehovah might tell him. To his astonishment a voice within him distinctly said: "Wait, it is not yet time!" David, who had fixed his eyes intently upon his teacher, waited patiently for an answer. Samuel raised himself in his chair.

"My son," he began solemnly, "I could give you an answer that would entirely satisfy your soul, but Jehovah, whom I serve, bids me to wait. This much, however, I may freely tell you today: be not dismayed at your lowly birth; the time will come when you will be worthy enough to woo the daughter of Saul."

David's face was flushed.

"How can these things be?" he faltered.

"Do you remember," answered the prophet, "when I anointed you in the house of your father?"

David nodded his head expectantly.

"I have never told you its meaning, nor may I do so now, but know that Jehovah has chosen you to be his vessel to accomplish great things."

Samuel stopped. He must not tell more.

"Let this suffice," he added. "Wait upon Jehovah, remember all his precepts. As for me, I shall not cease to pray for you night and day that your way may prosper. In due time things shall be revealed to you that will astonish your soul."

"Oh, father," David exclaimed incredulously.

"Do not doubt my words," Samuel declared posi-

tively. "Jehovah is God. He has said it, he will also bring it to pass, for he is a rock; his work is perfect; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he."

Since that time David had even more to think and dream about when he tended his sheep.

CHAPTER VI.

A VALOROUS SHEPHERD AND A MAGNANIMOUS PRINCE

The attitude of the Philistines had, in the meantime, assumed a more and more threatening aspect. They were advancing as far into Judah as the neighborhood of Bethlehem. About ten miles to the south-west of that town lay Shokoh, the modern Shuweikeh. Here a broad wady, or valley, marking a water-course, ran north for about an hour's distance. This wady is identical with the modern Wady-es-Sumt, also called the valley of the acacias, the ancient valley of Elah, or the terebinth. At the modern village of Sakarieth, the Philistines encamped on the southern slope of the Wady, and Saul's army had drawn up on the northern slope.

For several weeks the armies thus lay facing each other, being separated by the depth of the valley that intervened. None dared attack the other, only it could be noticed that from day to day the Philistines waxed bolder, whilst the men of Israel turned craven.

One morning a great hubbub ensued in the camp of the Philistines. The Israelites wondered what

was the cause. They needed not to wait very long. A man of colossal dimensions stepped forth from the ranks of the enemy, and, with a voice that would have drowned the roar of a lion, challenged the hosts of Saul.

"Why are you come out to set your battle in array?" he shouted. "Am not I a Philistine, and you the servants to Saul? Select a man, therefore, from among you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and kill me, then will we be your servants; but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall you be our servants. I, Goliath of Gath, defy this day the armies of Israel: give me the man, that we may fight together!"

Nearer and nearer the giant champion approached. Saul and his men looked on in dismay. Their faces blanched. Who could engage to fight with such a man? Why, he must be ten feet tall! A helmet of brass was upon his head. A heavy coat of mail covered his body. Upon his legs were greaves of steel. In his hand he carried a spear which had the extraordinary proportions of a weaver's beam! Who could fight with such a man!

Forty days in succession, Goliath thus stepped out of the camp of the Philistines, shaking his hand at the covenant people and calling them cowards and poltroons. His boldness increased in the exact proportion as the Hebrews lost heart. Of late he had descended into the valley that separated the two hosts, and even come up the slope on which his enemies perched. He would shake with defiant, uproarious laughter when he saw the Israelites take to their heels as game before the hunter.

Saul was in a desperate state of mind. Now and

again the ailment which had but recently been cured by the melodies of David's harp, showed distinct signs of reappearance. Everybody tried to keep out of the presence of the king.

One day Saul called his officers and captains together and made them a proposition.

"I cannot bear it any longer to be mocked by that Philistine," he cried. "Is there no one in all the host of Israel to stop the mouth of that braggart? Listen! The man who kills him I shall enrich with great riches; moreover, I shall give him my eldest daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel."

The men looked sullenly on the ground. No one volunteered. The reward which the king had offered was great indeed, but the prospect of victory was too remote.

Now while these things happened in the valley of Elah, David was pursuing his humble avocation upon the plains of Bethlehem, no more than ten miles away. Twice again he had seen the prophet. Little by little he had ceased to doubt the seer's description of the future. The prophet was in earnest. He was as the mouth of Jehovah. What he said was the truth. A great enthusiasm began to stir in the breast of the youth and, by meditation and prayer, he prepared himself against the hour when the Lord might openly call him.

All kinds of disquieting rumors were noised abroad about Israel's plight in the presence of the army of the Philistines. Jesse grew more and more uneasy as the days rolled on without hearing of anything decisive or definite. The news that reached Bethlehem he believed to be highly colored. His

heart craved something definite—something dependable. Accordingly, he concluded to send David into the camp to ascertain the true state of affairs.

"I am quite concerned for my sons," he said one day. "And I am anxious about the outcome of the war. Take, therefore, an ephah of parched grain, and ten loaves of bread, and carry them into the camp to your brothers. In addition to the loaves, take along ten cheeses, and give them to the captain of their thousand. Inquire diligently after your brothers' welfare, and see how the battle goes. Do not tarry longer than is necessary."

David obeyed. Early next morning he was on the way. After a few hour's walk he came to the position of the army. He noticed quite a bustle and commotion. The men of Israel were being put in battle array against the Philistines, who shouted on the opposite hill. In true Oriental fashion defies were hurled from camp to camp. David left his baggage with the keeper of the baggage, and ran forward to the foremost ranks, where, as he knew, the position of Judah, and, therefore, that of his brothers, must be. He thought from the turmoil that a battle was about to ensue. Quite excitedly he made his inquiries. It did not take him long to find a few of his brothers. He had just asked them what the tumult was about, when Goliath issued from the ranks of the Philistines, and challenged Israel as before.

David saw to his astonishment that his countrymen, including his brothers, listened to the defy with blanched and troubled faces. Not enough: they actually retreated when the Philistine drew nearer.

David was mystified. Did his countrymen run away? Did they flee before a man who was uncircumcised? Why did no one take up the challenge?

"Eliab," David cried, taking his eldest brother by the coat-sleeve, "wherefore do you run? Why do not you smite this vaunting Philistine?"

His brother sneered at him, half amused, half angry.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed. "Come along or that Philistine will swallow you for his dessert!"

A group of soldiers approached in great haste. They were running away from the champion of Gath. Willy nilly David was caught in the current and dragged along. His cheeks burned with the flush of shame.

"Stop!" he cried ever and anon. "Stop! Do not run away! Quit yourselves like men!"

In vain. Officers and privates fled—farther, farther. In the rearward could be heard the boisterous laughter of the insolent Philistine. The man had ascended up the slope and stood in all his massive strength where Judah had been encamped.

"Blast him!" gnashed the Israelites, when they came to a standstill, at the voice of defiance behind them. "Is there no one to smite him? A curse on his head!"

"Why don't *you* smite him?" David demanded of the biggest man of them all. "Bestir yourself! Take away the reproach from Israel!"

The soldier regarded David with an evil eye.

"Indeed!" he retorted, "and who are you? Fight with that fellow? Do you think me a fool? Why, look at him! That staff of his is like a weav-

er's beam; look at his spear's head, it must weigh at least six hundred shekels of iron: and I have a good idea that the weight of his coat of mail is five thousand shekels of brass; as for his height, it must be more than six cubits. Fight with such a man? No, not I? Give way, boy!"

"Nay," David persisted, "stay, I pray you. Tell me, has this man defied Israel before?"

"Yes, you stripling, this is the fortieth day!"

"And no one has been found to take up the challenge?"

"No one. But give way, the cursed gentile approaches still nearer!"

It was so. Goliath of Gath, apparently delighted at the fear of the Israelites, this day proceeded further than ever. The men of Judah again sought safety in flight, pushing and shoving along the reluctant shepherd lad. At last the Philistine champion seemed to have his fill of gratification. He stood still, gave a reverberating shout, and returned the way he had come.

"May the murrain devour your limbs and boils and blotches infest your carcase!" one of the soldiers growled.

David's temper was up. His eyes flashed fire and resentment. His hands clenched into fists.

"Nay," he cried, "let the sword of a valiant Israelite lay that scornful boaster in the dust! for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

At this moment Eliab came upon the scene. He had overheard what David said. Taking his brother by the collar, he administered to him a withering rebuke.

"You snappish boy!" he exclaimed. "Do you dare speak thus to your betters? Are you bold enough to insinuate that we lack courage? Why did you come down anyhow, and with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? But I know your pride, and the naughtiness of your heart; you came down that you might see the battle, and now you fill the air with empty words. Get yourself home to your sheep-cotes!"

David shook himself free.

"You wrong me," he rejoined. "I did not come to satisfy my curiosity. Father commanded me to go. The sheep have been left in good hands. As to my inquiries, what is wrong about them? May not I inquire why all you men of war stand helpless in the face of this insult to the nation? The shame of it devours my heart! The disgrace of it sickens my soul! As long as this blot remains upon our banner, I shall not return home! As Jehovah lives, if there is no other man to slay this ranting gentile, I shall do it!"

"I like your assurance," Eliab responded with infinite scorn.

The king was standing before his tent in the presence of his chief captains. A haggard expression was on his face. He had told his men that something had to be done. It was evident that the spirit of his host was melting away day by day. Already there were deserters. The end could be nothing but ignominious defeat. Saul was waiting for a reply, when, all of a sudden, two soldiers approached in great haste.

"Oh, king," they cried, "a man has been found to engage in combat Goliath of Gath."

Saul gave a start. A gleam of hope appeared in his eyes.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

"Upon yonder hill!"

The king grew impatient.

"Go, fetch him hither at once!"

A few minutes later David was escorted into the presence of Saul.

"You?" the king exclaimed incredulously.

"There must be a mistake. You surely do not intend to fight with that Philistine?"

Also Jonathan drew near. His features were drawn.

"You cannot do it, David!" he warned.

But there was not the slightest fear or faint-heartedness about the shepherd lad.

"Let no man's heart fail because of that blustering gentile," he said firmly; "your servant will go and fight with him if the king allows."

"Boy," the monarch cried angrily, "have a care what you say. You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he a powerful man of war. Pride goads you on."

David colored under the rebuke.

"Nay," he replied, "it is not pride that moves me to this step. It is mortification. I care not to live as long as this boastful Philistine defies the armies of the living God!"

"It will not do!" the king rejoined. "It will not do!"

But David did not flinch.

"May I tell the king something?" he asked.

"Say on!" Saul encouraged.

David raised himself up, and his form seemed to grow.

"Let the king listen and judge," he said. "Some weeks ago your servant was keeping his father's sheep, when there came a bear and took a lamb of the flock. I went after the beast, I smote it, and delivered the lamb out of its mouth. A little later there came a lion and took a lamb. I went also after him, caught him by the beard, smote him, and slew him, and saved his prey. So your servant smote both the lion and the bear: this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing that he has defied our armies. Jehovah has delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will also deliver me out of the hand of this gentile!"

Saul found himself strangely moved at the words of David. He felt a lump rising in his throat. He admired the simple, child-like, but most triumphant faith that the lad showed in venturing to undertake this conflict. It brought back to him, momentarily, reminiscences of a time when he himself had been possessed of a similar faith.

"Go," he said, with choked voice. "May Jehovah be with you. But wait, your antagonist is clad in brass and steel. You cannot confront him in your shepherd's dress. Ho, my men, array this youth with my armor, put my helmet upon his head, and gird my sword upon his thigh."

The behest of the king was executed with great rapidity. When he was wholly armed, David essayed to go. But he found that the coat of mail encumbered him. It was the first time that he wore such heavy apparel. He knew immediately that he

could not fight that way. What was a protection to others, would prove but a snare and a hindrance to him. He turned to the king with beseeching eyes.

"I cannot go with these accouterments," he said, "for I have not proved them. Pray, take them off."

Saul's men grinned.

"Serves you right," Eliab muttered, who stood quite near. "Presumptuous fellow! You can't even wear a coat of mail and presume to do what all the host of Israel failed to do these forty days? Serves you right!"

When the encumbering armor had been removed from David's limbs, he picked up his shepherd's staff, and descended into the valley. From a little brook which murmured there, he selected five smooth stones for his sling, and put them into the bag that was at his side. Then he hailed the Philistine camp with a shout of defiance. The Israelites, who had watched his movements and heard the defy, broke out in thunderous applause.

The Philistines had heard the shout. A commotion ensued in their ranks. Presently Goliath appeared. That sobered the Israelites. They shrank back with fear. Only one man showed neither dread nor agitation. Undismayed David passed along through the valley of Elah and approached the opposite slope.

The uproar had ceased on both sides. The eye of friend and foe regarded in dumb surprise the lonely figure, who, armed with but a staff and a sling, drew nearer and nearer to the camp of the Philistines.

The Philistines, evidently, did not understand the

meaning of David's advance. That a boy—for he looked like a boy—would undertake to challenge their champion seemed altogether unreasonable. So they stood and wondered.

But they should not remain in doubt very long. David stood still upon a level place. He laid both his insignificant weapons on the ground, formed a kind of trumpet with his hands, and once more sounded a ringing defy in the very face of the astonished enemies.

Now they understood, and when they understood they were roiled. Was this the champion of Israel? Goliath stepped forth, boiling with anger. He felt insulted. He thought it little glory to fight with such a contemptible person—a stripling boy, fitter to accompany the daughters of Israel in their dances than to lead on the men of Israel in their battles. Notwithstanding, such insolence must not go without punishment. He would see to it that it never happened again. So he came on and drew near to David; and the man who bare his shield went before him. The nearer he came, the better he was able to discern the delicate features of him whom he was to fight, the more he disdained him. His pent-up rage delivered itself in oaths and curses.

“Am I a dog!” he roared in the heat of his fury, —“am I a dog that you come to me with a shepherd's gear? By the gods of the Philistines, I will this day give your flesh to the birds of the heavens, and to the beasts of the fields!”

If he had thought to scare his opponent with words like these, he soon found out that he was mistaken, for the lad neither trembled nor fled.

On the contrary, David promptly responded in language caustic and scornful.

"You boastful Philistine," he retorted, "listen to my words. Mark well what I shall say, for you will never again hear the voice of man: you come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin: but I come to you in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day will Jehovah deliver you into my hand; and I will smite you, and take your head from off your trunk; and I will give the dead bodies of the hosts of the Philistines this day to the birds of the heavens, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that Jehovah saves not with sword and spear: for the battle is Jehovah's, and he will give you into our hands."

"Now, that is enough!" the giant bawled at the hearing of these words. "You scapegrace! You chatterbox! You surely have the gift of the gab! But come on: I shall close your mouth forever!"

And now Goliath approached with great strides. He was thoroughly infuriated. Down in his heart he believed that the youth had but been mocking him; that as soon as circumstances would take a serious turn, he would take to his heels and flee. That would have vexed him unspeakably, for he was thirsting for blood.

But David did not run away. He meant to fight. He took a stone from his bag, placed it correctly into the sling, ran about a dozen paces toward his Herculean foe, whirled the sling about his head and slang the stone with terrific certainty right into the

forehead of Goliath. The champion of the Philistines threw his hands into the air and fell upon his face to the earth like a log. The man who bore the shield of the giant, immediately forsook his master and fled. But David ran and stood over his enemy. Already his opponent was dead. The stone, so skillfully slung, had sunk deep into the giant's forehead and caused instant death. David quickly disengaged the sword of the dead man, brandished it on high, and, with a mighty stroke, cut off his head, thus affording to friend and foe unmistakable evidence that Goliath was dead.

Both the astonishment of the Israelites and the consternation of the Philistines was beyond description. When the latter saw that their champion was dead, they fled in wild disorder. It was true, then, that there was a God in Israel! It was true that the battle was Jehovah's, and that he had given them into Israel's hands! Judah and Israel, on the other hand, raised a shout of triumph, and hotly pursued the Philistines up the ravine of Elah, through the Wady-es-Sumt, to Sharim, and even far beyond it to the very gates of Gath.

David did not join in the pursuit of the foe. With the head of the Philistine in his hand, he came to Saul, who greeted him cordially.

"Well done, my son," he said. "You have wrought a great victory for Israel today. I see you are not only a clever musician, but you also know how to fight. Men like you have become scarce in Israel. It will not do for you to return to your father. I need you for the battle. Some other man shall be sent to him to take care of his

sheep. I want you to remain in my immediate presence."

David bowed himself to the earth and quietly answered: "I am the king's servant!"

"Not so, my son," Saul warmly protested. "I have promised to the conqueror of Goliath my eldest daughter as a reward. When the war is at an end, and we have returned home in peace, I shall call you my son-in-law."

David was overwhelmed. His color rose. The king's son-in-law! Was it possible that such things could be? What had the prophet said but a few weeks ago? "As for Michal, you will soon be noble enough to ask for her hand." Did that find its fulfillment now already?

"The spoil that you have taken is yours," continued the king. "Give me only the sword. I shall send it to Ahimelech the priest who dwells at Nob, that it remain as a testimony before Jehovah forever."

When Saul had dismissed the youth, Jonathan, who also had refrained from mingling in the pursuit, came up to his friend.

"Come with me to my tent," he said. "I have much to say to you."

When the two men were arrived in the tent, the prince embraced the shepherd lad.

"You have wrought with God today," he declared. "I admire your courage and faith. Nay, do not interrupt me. You are a hero. If it had not been for you, the Philistines would have triumphed over us before long. I am glad you came."

He embraced his friend again.

"You praise me too much," David protested.

"No, no," Jonathan rejoined, "I do not praise you half enough. You showed more valor today than any other man in Israel. I am glad for my sister's sake."

David blushed to his ears. The prince smiled merrily.

"So you are to become my brother-in-law. Well, what do you say to that?"

David's confusion increased. He was not able to speak.

"Never mind," Jonathan continued goodnaturedly. "But, my lad, I fear there's a hitch! The king is minded to reward you with Merab, whilst you, to all intents, would much rather marry Michal."

David's embarrassment knew no bounds.

"How—how—how—" he ejaculated, and stopped abruptly.

"Oh," the prince said amusedly, "do you think I failed to notice your agitation, when you bade my sister good-bye?"

David hung his head.

"Cheer up, David," Jonathan consoled him. "We must put our heads together now, for you know Paltiel has his eyes fixed on Michal. Never mind, lad," he added encouragingly, when his friend gave a start, "you are in the lead, for I am quite sure that Michal loves you, whilst, as everybody knows, she nearly hates Paltiel. The king, also, loves you. If we all hold together, we need not despair of the future. And, by the way, it was of this I desired to speak to you more particularly." He took the youth's hand. "David," he proceeded ardently, "shall we not make the bond of our friendship still firmer than it is? Shall we not pledge to one

another fidelity and faithfulness to the end of our lives?"

The prince, with radiant eyes, surveyed the face of the shepherd lad. Presently he let go of his hand, walked over to a little table and filled a goblet with wine. Next, he pricked with his dagger a vein on the wrist of his left arm, and permitted a few drops of blood to fall into the potion. With a mute but eloquent gesture he handed the dagger to David, who, swayed by the enthusiasm of his friend, found it impossible to resist. Also his blood trickled into the wine. When it was done, the king's son drank half of the contents of the cup and thereupon handed it to David.

"Drink!" he urged.

David drank.

"Now we have drunk one another's blood," Jonathan cried. "We are friends forever. Jehovah is witness!"

"He is witness!" David murmured with emotion.

"Embrace!" the prince exclaimed, extending wide his arms.

They embraced.

"And now take off your shepherd's dress," Jonathan said. "I shall clothe you in my raiments. All the host shall know that we are friends. Here, take this robe of mine, and this armor, and this sword, and this girdle. Wear them in remembrance of this hour."

"You overwhelm me," David stammered.

"Nay," Jonathan replied. "You honor me with your friendship, for you are better than I. You dared where I shrank; you believed where I doubted; you fought where I despaired. But your cour-

age and faith have put new courage within my soul. Jehovah, he is God! That you have taught me today! He reigns supreme, and they who put their trust in him shall not be put to shame. Because you have shown me this today, my soul is knit to your soul."

CHAPTER VII.

LOSS AND GAIN

The victory over the Philistines had been signal and complete. The defeat of their champion had altogether dispirited them. The Israelites brought home an immense amount of booty.

When the army had returned from the chase and rallied again, Saul prepared for a triumphal march through the towns and cities on the way home. It is the custom in the East on the return of a victorious army that the natives gather in large processions to celebrate the valor of the soldiers. Women and children band together, and, as they go along, gratify the heroes with dancing, music, and songs in honor of their martial deeds.

David's victory over Goliath had spread through the cities of Israel with remarkable quickness. In Bethlehem every man, woman, and child repeated the story. When, now, it became known, that the host was to pass along the borders of their own village, their joy knew no bounds. They all poured forth upon the open plain to see the gallant soldiers. When the army drew near, the women spontane-

ously grouped themselves into companies and began to dance and to sing. Hand-drums resounded. Triangles were heard. Wind instruments pealed forth their notes. Wilder and wilder the dancing became, louder and louder waxed the song.

Now the women approached the place where Saul and his captains could be perceived. Two choruses promptly separated from the main procession. Whilst they whirled about in their mimic dances, they sang antiphonally to one another :

“Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands.”

The words were immediately taken up by the whole company, and with powerful force it resounded over the plain :

“Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands.”

A Westerner cannot but be struck with the ruggedness of the compliment offered to David. To have honored him as more ready to incur risk and sacrifice for his country, even in encounters involving bloodshed, would have been worthy of women ; but to make the standard of compliment the number of lives destroyed, the amount of blood shed, indicates a coarseness of feeling characteristic of a barbarous age.

The compliment, however, was quite significant to the king. It poured bitterness into the wine of his joy. A cruel serpent immediately began to gnaw at his heart-strings. He was shaken to the very

foundations of his being. "They have ascribed to David ten thousands," he said to himself angrily, "And to me they have ascribed but thousands: what can he have more but the kingdom?" And presently the thought flashed through his mind: "What if that shepherd lad be my rival?"

When, upon Gilgal's height, Samuel had rejected him, he had at the same time declared, that Jehovah would seek himself a man after his own heart to be prince over Israel. Was David that man? Did David stand in any relation to Samuel? He must without delay investigate the antecedents of that youth. Woe to him, if any collusion existed between him and the prophet! He surely would make short shrift of him.

As to David, the song had made him feel uneasy. He hoped that Saul would not take notice of the words of the foolish women. In this hope he found himself disappointed. His keen eyes at once perceived that the king corrugated his brows; he observed that Saul's countenance was no more towards him as it had been before. This grieved him very much. There was but one thing that he could do: he must behave himself wisely. What increased his plight was that in two or three more cities through which they passed, the same song was chanted. He was glad when the army got home.

It was the third morning after the arrival in Gibeah. Saul rose from his bed tired and out of sorts. He had not slept one wink. It was all David's fault. The song of the women of Bethlehem still rankled in his mind, robbed him of sleep, and made him furious. He began to hate the shepherd lad with an ever increasing intensity. It could

not be otherwise—David was the man of whom Samuel had spoken. This became more clear to him every day. That youth had been successful where he had failed. He had scored a victory than which no greater one had ever been fought in Israel. Jehovah was with him. Why should he not aspire to the throne? True, heretofore his position had been very humble. But what of that? One hour had made him a distinguished man. He himself had promised to accept him as his son-in-law. Ha, what foolishness! No, that should never be. He must get rid of the youth with the utmost speed.

Well, soon he would know more about him. He had commissioned Paltiel to go back to Bethlehem and search out all he could about David's previous mode of life. Today Paltiel must return. Woe to the harper if it developed that between him and Samuel there existed a secret understanding! He would kill him with his own hands!

In the early forenoon of that day Paltiel returned. Saul closeted himself with his servant and listened attentively to his report. What he heard confirmed his suspicions. It became as plain as the day that David was on intimate terms with the prophet. In his mind there was no longer a shadow of doubt that the newly created captain was Jehovah's choice for the throne.

"How did you obtain all this information?" the king demanded of Paltiel.

"Oh," replied the latter, "that was very easy. The youth is worshipped by the whole town. Men, women, and children fairly idolize him. The fact that he played before you at your recent illness, was the first rung in the ladder of his fame, although

by the cleverness upon his harp, and the skillfulness with which he used his sling, he had quite favorably impressed the town people before. Then came the encounter with both bear and lion, which added to his fame, and now, at last, his victory over the giant of Gath, which crowned his reputation. The people are almost beside themselves with conceit at the thought that their town produced such a man. I talked with the father of the lad—by the by, a venerable old man, who is fast declining. He confided to me that at first David had been rather overlooked by the rest of the family. 'But,' said he, 'the boy has made good. There's timber in him that we knew not of. He will yet blaze a way for himself in Israel.' And then he became thoughtful. He softly nodded to himself in deep meditation. I was careful not to interrupt him, and my patience was soon rewarded, for the old man continued dreamily, talking more to himself than to me: 'Now I understand—now I understand!' I still maintained my silence, wondering what he was beginning to understand. Again my discretion was being rewarded, for after a while he added: 'But who would have thought of such a thing!' At this moment he became aware of me again and went on enthusiastically: 'Listen, man: one day Samuel came down to our town. He sacrificed upon yonder hill. After the service he stayed at my house. He confided to me that the Lord had chosen one of my sons to accomplish some mighty work for the nation. All my boys—seven of them—passed before the seer. I thought for sure he would pick out Eliab, the eldest, for he is a splendid figure of manhood. But no, the prophet did not choose him,

nor did he choose any one of the seven. I had to fetch David from the sheepecotes. Thinking that the stripling would never do for an extraordinary task, I had neglected to present him at all. Now mark my surprise: no sooner had the prophet fixed his eyes upon my youngest son, than he took a vial of oil from his girdle and anointed him with great emotion. I looked on in amazement; rather, I think I smiled a disdainful smile, but now I understand . . . '

"But what is the matter, my Lord?" Paltiel suddenly cried out, for all the blood had receded out of the countenance of the king. His eyes stared wildly upon the narrator. Foam was issuing out of his mouth, his teeth appeared set, and his lips were compressed. "Mercy," Paltiel said to himself, "he is mad again!"

But the king was not mad,—he was on the verge of madness, but he was not mad yet. Only a hellish fury burned in his soul. It had got the mastery of him when his servant alluded to the anointing of David. He alone understood the significance of that act. Had not Samuel anointed him, too? He, Saul, was the first layman upon whom the sacred oil had ever been poured. No one had been present at the occasion. The ceremony and its meaning were unknown to the people. He alone knew what it implied. There could be no doubt anymore: David was his rival! The prophet had chosen the shepherd youth as his successor. Curses and maledictions! And he had heaped upon the head of that man distinction and honor! A very frenzy of hatred and malice began to seethe and boil within him. That harper must be gotten rid of at once!

"Are you sure that the old man spoke the truth?" he asked of his servant as soon as he had found his composure again.

"Yes, quite sure, but let not the king behave thus. Shall I call for a physician?"

"No," his master replied fiercely. "Call David. Tell him to bring his harp along to play before me."

Paltiel went to do as he was bidden. The king remained alone. With an almost superhuman effort he calmed the storm that raged in his bosom. He must be on his guard, for David, being a shrewd man, would quickly scent that there was something amiss.

The king reclined on a cushioned divan and hid two javelins under a robe. Now let his rival come!

About an hour passed. Presently Paltiel returned with David. Saul's servant had had some difficulty finding the shepherd youth. The young man had gone out with Ishvi and Malchishua. After some tedious searching he had found the little party upon a knoll. They slung stones at a mark. All out of breath he reached the place.

"The king requests your presence," he sputtered. "Come quickly. Fetch your harp along. The malady has returned."

David hurried home at once. His unsuspecting soul foresaw no danger. Being always ready to tender his services to any one in need, he did not hesitate one moment to come to the aid of the king. Whilst he sped along it occurred to him that if he succeeded again in allaying the suffering of his master, the latter might perhaps regard him once more with favor.

Since the army arrived in Gibeah, David had not

set foot within the royal palace. Saul had summoned many other officers to confer with him, but David had not been called. The youth felt the neglect and smarted under it, but he was wise enough not to let anybody perceive it. On this particular morning the sons of Saul had invaded his quarters and urged him to teach them as before.

When David entered the king's chamber, he saw at a glance that he had before him a very ill man. Saul's forehead was furrowed, his brows were contracted. A scowl darkened his face, and in his eyes there shone a sinister fire.

"Stand before me and play," the king addressed the shepherd lad. "You, Paltiel, may go about your business. I have need of you no longer."

The servant retired. David's fingers glided softly over the strings. He wondered as to what would be suitable for the present occasion. The king was in trouble—perhaps in need of guidance. What if he sang of the shepherd of Israel—of him who safely leads even through the valley of the shadow of death? Yes, that would do. Sweetly the strains of the pastoral hymn floated through the chamber:

"Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want."

The king listened with closed eyes. The melody seemed to soothe him. Encouraged thereby, David, softly, subduedly, began to chant also the words, as at the first rendering before the queen, meanwhile watching the king's countenance with a look of concern. Saul did not stir. He seemed to be lulled into slumber by the wonderful music. Presently he gave a start. David had just sung the words:

"Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over!"

"Ha!" the monarch cried. "That's it—is it? I will look to that. There, take that! And that!"

Quick as lightning the king had reached for the hidden javelins and thrown them at David, intending to pin him to the wall against which he was leaning. But the young man was lithe as a wild thing of the forest. With great nimbleness he avoided the deadly darts, so that they struck harmlessly into the plaster of the wall, where they remained fastened. Saul gazed at the harper in stupid amazement. That was the first time in his life that he had missed an aim so near. David, however, did not give him time to reflect. It was dangerous to linger longer. In great haste he darted out of the chamber where a snare had been laid for his life.

David's first impulse was to flee. Then he thought of Jonathan. What should he say to Jonathan? There had been no witnesses. What if the king denied having attempted to kill him? What did his word amount to if pitted against that of Saul? No, he would stay. Perhaps it was only a fit of frenzy that had actuated the king. On coming to his senses, Saul would surely feel sorry. At any rate, it was not probable that the king would openly try to take his life. He was warned now. That was an advantage. He would walk about with open eyes. If there were signs of a plot to slay him, he would forthwith leave the court and seek for shelter.

David felt sad—very sad. All his castles in the air had in one moment dissolved into smoke and ashes. He had, on the previous days, been thinking seriously of ways and means to get out of the

quandary into which the king's promise had placed him. It had appeared to him that the best thing would be to tell Saul the entire truth, and to petition him for Michal in the place of Merab. It seemed unreasonable that a father would interfere with the happiness of his children. Now all his fine calculations had exploded like a glistening soap-bubble. If, what had just happened was premeditated, it bordered on madness to believe that the king would still make him his son-in-law.

As to Saul, when he found that his prey had escaped, a violent trembling seized upon him. The failure of his attempt only strengthened him in the conviction that whilst God had forsaken him, he was with David. The result was a feeling of fear and terror. He refrained to mention the incident to any one. Not even Paltiel learned what had passed between the harper and his lord, although he was a-quiver with curiosity. Saul had destroyed every trace of his assault. With his own hand he had pulled the javelins out of the wall and covered the place with a rug. After some reflection he reached the conclusion not to make another attempt upon the life of the youth, but, for the present, to send him away. He would make him commander over a thousand men and advise him to clear the borders of Israel from the enemies that still remained. It was not unlikely that, in an engagement with the Philistines or other foes, he would some day find his end. That was a convenient way to get rid of the youth. To kill him outright was rather perilous. The people loved him too much. It was better that the young man's dash and daring brought about his own destruction.

From the presence of the king David had gone to his quarters. But he did not stay long. He craved breathing space and elbow room.

The royal palace was surrounded by an immense vineyard. This vineyard contained many beautiful and spacious arbors. At the southernmost end he knew of an extremely cozy place that was grown all over with vines and shrubbery. More than once he had spent under its thick foliage a quiet hour, composing and meditating. Thither he would go today.

Quite stealthily he went to the place, his harp under his arm. No one saw him. He was very thankful for it. At last he reached the leafy retreat. With a sigh of relief he sat himself down on a bench and laid the harp on the table before him.

David reflected. He was undoubtedly in a bad way. The king had looked at him through eyes surcharged with hate and vengeance. Now what had he done? Was it his fault that the foolish women of Bethlehem had glorified him in their chants?

David groaned. He thought once more of running away. He thought of going to Ramah to tell Samuel all that had happened. Perhaps the old prophet would know of a way out. But then, if he went to Ramah Saul would undoubtedly hear of it, and Samuel might have to smart for it. No, it would not do to go to Samuel. Perhaps the best thing after all would be to wait. The storm might blow over. Even at the royal court he was in the hands of Jehovah.

Jehovah! Yes, that was it: he must not flee; the

God who had so often delivered him in the past, would also preserve him from harm in the future.

Gradually, David became altogether calm. He made up his mind to stay and to weather the storm. Was not Jehovah able to change the hearts of kings like water-brooks?

He reached for his harp. Harmoniously the melodies rose and fell. With subdued voice the shepherd lad chanted words of prayer.

We must now turn our eyes to Michal. When the victorious army had returned to Gibeah, she had just caught a glimpse of David. But that glimpse was enough. She said to herself that none was fairer and more manly than he. The fame of David's courageous deed had preceded the victor by fully two days. Michal was delighted at the news. Now the young man was enabled to openly sue for her hand. She longed to have a word with him, but David had consistently stayed aloof from the palace. At this the princess was not a little disappointed.

On the forenoon of the third day after the arrival of the troops, Michal stood meditatively at her window and looked over the rolling fields that her view commanded. All of a sudden she gave a start. She had observed David and Paltiel hurrying across the court-yard and disappearing in the palace. David carried his harp. The two men had looked very grave. Was the king her father ill again?

The maiden listened in breathless suspense. Soon the strains of the harp faintly reached her ears. The music swelled. Now she heard David's voice. How sweetly that voice could sing! The better to understand she leaned out of the window. What

was that? The music had suddenly culminated in a shrill false chord. She strained her ears to the limit, but all was still. That was quite singular. Presently she withdrew from the window. She saw David issuing from the main entrance and hastening away as if pursued by mortal foes. Terror stood written all over his noble countenance. Why did he flee? What had taken place?

Michal pressed her hands upon her heaving bosom. With her eyes she followed David as long as she could. When, at last, a turn in the road received him, she concluded to find out what had prompted his flight. She left her room and looked about. Nothing unusual attracted her attention. She descended a flight of stairs and was just going to cross a spacious hall, when Paltiel appeared on the other side. The officer greeted her with extravagant obsequiousness. She remained rooted to the spot and returned the salutation with a scarcely perceptible nod of the head. Paltiel perceived it and turned pale. Then a haughty expression came to his face. He bowed once more and thereupon disappeared in the king's apartments. When the officer was out of sight, Michal raced up the stairs again, plunged into her room, and, throwing herself upon a settle, sobbed violently.

After a while she grew more tranquil. How close it was in the house! She decided to walk a while in the garden. It was a fine day. From vine to vine she went. The grapes were just beginning to ripen. Now and then she plucked an exceptionally large one and drank its fragrant juice.

It was very still amongst the richly laden bushes. On and on she sauntered, racking her poor little

head for a solution of the episode she had witnessed. At last she came to the southernmost end of her father's garden. She remembered the cozy little arbor, and felt like sitting down a few minutes to rest and think.

She drew nearer but stopped abruptly. The soft strains of a harp had fallen on her wistful ears. A pleasant sensation ran quivering through her body. She held her breath to listen. That was David. She knew the inimitable touch of his fingers—the matchlessness of his art. No one played as he played. Was he already in the arbor yonder? And was he alone?

It was not altogether becoming a princess to play the spy, but what will not a woman do when she is in love!

Michal stealthily crept nearer. Unobserved she reached the back end of the arbor. Here she hid herself in the vines and foliage which for many years had escaped the pruning knife of the gardener. Fear of detection caused her heart to beat with such violence that she thought its thuds would surely betray her. But the harper was too absorbed in his music—or his reflections. He had no idea that two beautiful eyes were intently fixed on his face. Now he sang. It was a rather doleful song. These were the words he sang:

“O Jehovah my God, in thee do I take refuge:
Save me from all that pursue me and deliver me,
Lest they tear my soul like a lion,
Rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver.
O Jehovah my God, if I have done this;
If there be iniquity in my hands;

If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace
with me

Let the enemy pursue my soul, and overtake it;
Yea, let him tread my life down to the earth,
And lay my glory in the dust.

Judge me, O Jehovah, according to my righteousness,
and according to mine integrity that is in
me.

Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end.
My shield is with God,
Who saveth the upright in heart."

Michal was strangely moved. She regarded intently the thoughtful face of the shepherd lad. Something had happened to him. Had her father shown him his displeasure? But why? What could have come between the two men—and that so suddenly? A firm resolve shone in her eyes. She determined to find out. When David resumed his playing, she cautiously left her hiding place and boldly stepped into the entrance of the bower.

"Michal!"

Of all human beings the young man would least have expected to be surprised by Saul's daughter. He rose to his feet and grasped his harp as if in need of support. With an embarrassed look he swept the beautiful maiden before him. Ah, Michal was beautiful! She was a typical Hebrew virgin—hair dark and heavy; eyes deep brown, shaded by long, black lashes; nose slightly curved; lips full and rosy.

"Have I scared you?" the princess asked. "I heard you play and came near to hear better.

Since you don't call on us, it has become necessary for us to call on you."

David was all confusion. He could not take his eyes away from the king's daughter. She looked perfectly adorable at this moment. He did not remember ever to have seen a sweeter woman. Her voice was as a melody to his ears. It was capable of such wonderful modulation and inflection that he found himself charmed every time he listened to it.

Michal entered the bower and seated herself.

"Play me one of my favorite pieces," she said. "Oh, please, sit down. Be at ease." She examined his face. "Pray," she went on, "why do you look so sad—why did you sing such doleful words?"

"You heard?"

She nodded her head seriously. "Every word!"

David looked on the ground.

"You scared me," Michal continued. "You spoke of enemies tearing your soul—of fleeing for refuge—of wickedness and integrity—of your life being trodden down to the earth, and what not."

David's hand glided over the strings.

"No," the princess interfered, checking his hand. "Something ails you. May not I know what it is?"

The lad's embarrassment increased. The touch of the maiden's hand had sent a thrill through his veins.

"Oh," he stammered, "it is nothing."

Michal looked offended. She pouted.

"It is nothing?" she said. "Do men, with blanched face, run from the presence of the king for nothing?"

A terrified expression came into David's eyes.

"So you know already?" he groaned.

The girl did not commit herself. Her thoughtful eyes seemed to read his very soul. David was at sea. Should he equivocate? Did Michal know? Had Saul, in his madness, openly talked about it?

"The king was not responsible," he murmured. "He was ill."

"Responsible for what?"

"Then you don't know?"

Michal raised herself up. She was determined to find out the whole truth now. That a scene had taken place between the lad and her father was plain as the day.

"Pray, David, do not torture me," she said excitedly. "Tell me what has happened. I want to know!"

The young man did not try to dodge any longer. In simple words he related what had occurred in the morning. When he mentioned the spear-thrusts, the princess turned very pale.

"You must leave this place—at once!" she ejaculated, when David had finished his story. "Your life is in hourly danger. Oh, that father could do such a thing!" she sobbed frantically.

"Hush!" David consoled her. "The king was ill. He knew not what he did."

"No, no," Michal exclaimed wildly, "he is jealous. Paltiel has been pouring venom into his ears. You are too indulgent."

She sobbed without restraint. David felt ill at ease. What in the world could he do? Almost unconsciously he put his arm about her waist to comfort her. The princess offered no resistance.

Rather, she yielded herself with absolute abandon. The young man's brain was like a wheel on fire. Everything seemed to go round, and round, and round. In a delirium of intoxication he clasped her to his tumultuous bosom.

"Michal!" he cried exultingly.

"Oh, David!" she responded.

David's bliss was entire. He strained the beloved woman to his breast and covered her lips and eyes with kisses.

How odd! But an hour ago he had thought himself the most miserable of men, and now his rapture almost knew no bounds.

"Then it is really true that you love me?" he asked.

"Can you still doubt it?" she murmured.

"No," he said, "I believe it." Then an expression of perturbation came into his eyes. "But now you must go," he urged her. "What, if some one should find us here? Go quickly, lest unbidden eyes, by chance or otherwise, discover us."

"But you?" she queried. "What will become of you?"

"Be calm on my account," he encouraged her. "My life is in God's hands. I am warned. I shall walk with open eyes. If I notice anything suspicious, I shall flee."

"I also shall watch. One more word. Don't you think we had better tell Jonathan what father has done?"

David reflected a moment.

"No," he advised. "It would only grieve him. Perhaps it was but a temporary distemper. If,

however, the matter becomes known, or the king continues to seek my life, we shall tell Jonathan the whole truth."

The lovers embraced once more, and then parted.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER

In the afternoon of that same day, Paltiel came to David and brought him a commission from the king. The young man was greatly surprised. Saul had made him captain over a thousand men and now charged him to leave on the following day to harass the foes of Israel. Why did Saul send him away? Had he repented of the foul act committed in the morning? Did shame and contrition stir in his heart? Was it malice that prompted the king? Would he make him captain of a thousand from sheer malice?

"Has the king improved?" he asked Paltiel, who regarded him with a wily look.

"He was quite well when I left him," the officer replied. "But he seemed very much excited when you quit his presence this morning."

David saw the trap. He fully controlled himself. "Yes," he returned. "The king was very ill. The music did not seem to relieve him. I am glad he feels better now."

Paltiel bit his lip. The shepherd lad was too wise for him. If his master did not tell him what had

happened between them, he would forever remain in the dark.

When Paltiel had left, David meditated a long time. He did not want to wrong the king, but the commission began to look somewhat suspicious to him. Was he going to slay him by the hand of assassins? Had he resolved to murder him far away from home? If the king had really repented of the deed, why did he not call him into his presence to make him his son-in-law?

The youth thought of Michal. He felt uneasy at the prospect of leaving her now. Paltiel stood high in the king's favor. He was constantly about him. What if Saul some fine day put down his foot and told the princess to marry that man? Would Michal be brave enough to refuse?

Women had not much to say in Israel. Fathers freely disposed of their daughters as they saw fit. If Saul commanded Michal to obey, the girl could only plead for mercy. But whether she would be able to move her father again as before, would be doubtful. Paltiel would not cease plying his master, and, no doubt, in time attain his object.

Still, there was the queen, there was Jonathan, there was Merab. All three loved both Michal and him. They would put in a word for Michal if her condition became precarious.

David was roused from his reverie by the sound of a footstep. Jonathan entered his quarters.

"I hear," he remarked, "that you have been made captain over a thousand?"

David nodded assent.

"And you are going away tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Hm! It's too bad. My mother the queen will be disappointed to hear it, and also Michal, I fancy. Why have you neglected to pay your respects to them? Mother talked of it yesterday evening."

David blushed. Should he tell Jonathan of what happened in the garden? Yes, it was best that his friend knew how matters stood.

"I saw Michal," he said quietly.

"You saw my sister Where? When?"

"This forenoon. In the garden."

"Well?"

"I confessed my love to her."

"And Michal?"

"She owned her love in return."

"There!" Jonathan extended his hand. "I am glad to hear it," he cried. "When shall you speak to the king?"

David smiled sadly.

"I do not know. At least not now."

"Why not now?"

There was pain written in David's face. Jonathan saw it and was curious. What had marred his friend's happiness?

"What ails you?" he said. "Tell me all." And, when David hesitated, he added reproachfully: "Have I not drunk of your blood? Have not you drunk of mine? Let there be no secret between you and me."

David passed his hand over his forehead.

"Then listen," he said. "You remember what the women sang when we returned from the battle?"

Jonathan nodded his head.

"Can I at all be blamed on account of their song?"

"Not at all. What of it?"

"The king hates me because of it."

"David!"

"Yes, it is even so."

"But why?"

"Because the women ascribed to me ten thousands and to him only thousands."

"What makes you think the king hates you?"

"The fact that he sought to take my life!"

"David!"

Jonathan bounced from the chair on which he had been sitting and stared at the speaker with eyes dilated with astonishment.

"It is even so, Jonathan," the shepherd lad continued gloomily, and then he related chronologically all that had taken place in the morning.

The king's son was dumbfounded.

"If you had not told me yourself," he groaned at last, "I should not believe a word about it. But, of course, it is evident that you speak the truth. Oh, God!"

"You see, therefore," his friend went on, "that it will not do to speak to the king now of my love for Michal. It would but deliver me—also herself—completely into his hands. He might make up his mind to give her to Paltiel immediately."

"Never!" the prince exclaimed.

"Calm yourself," David admonished gently. "Jehovah reigns. Perhaps it was but a recurrence of the malady that moved the king to aim at me with his darts. It is possible that he was not responsible."

"You are a good man!" Jonathan replied. "May Jehovah bless you for these words! They relieve me. Yes, yes, it cannot be otherwise. It was his

affliction. See, he has repented of it already. That's why he made you captain over a thousand. Go with God! Be successful in all your undertakings! When you return with glory, the king will not withhold Michal from you."

The next morning David departed. It had not been possible for him to see Michal again; that was a bitter pill; but he knew her to be under the protection of a faithful friend.

And now week passed after week. David was successful wherever he went. Regularly his messengers reported to the king what was being done. Saul observed the achievements of the youth and his hatred and jealousy waxed stronger and stronger. At times his fiery wrath broke forth in horrible imprecations.

"He prospers wherever he goes," he muttered to himself. "Instead of sinking into oblivion, he is more and more becoming the talk of the nation. I must disgrace him! I must disgrace him! I must show the people my utter contempt of him, else minstrels will soon sing his fame at every banquet."

There was a simple and effective way of humiliating the slayer of Goliath. If Merab were joined to some other man the people would understand that David's name was no more respected at court. Everybody knew that to the victor of Goliath had been promised his eldest daughter. If, now, Merab married another, the people must perforce believe that David's star was getting dim.

Maliciousness has a benumbing and blinding effect. Saul wished to debase David. He failed to see that instead of debasing the shepherd youth

he would debase himself by wantonly breaking his word.

Saul counted on still another possibility that might result if he thus dealt with David. To dispose of Merab in the manner indicated would be as great an affront as he could possibly put upon the lad. He hoped that David would resent it—that he would speak some indiscreet word or commit some rash and blameworthy act which would let him appear as a seditious person and thus place him within the power of the law.

The more the king thought on this thing the more he began to like it. Among the officers who had distinguished themselves in the late war was a certain Adriel the Meholathite. One day Saul summoned him into his presence and told him to go and get Merab, his eldest daughter, as a reward for his services. The man was not a little surprised at first, but saw no reason why he should disdain so great a gift. A few days later the wedding was celebrated at court, and Merab, who was too timid to raise objections, became his lawful wife.

But the king's expectations did not materialize. David discharged his duties as faithfully and loyally as ever. No bitter word fell from his lips. No lawless act did he commit. Quietly, conscientiously, he carried out the king's commands, and continued to prosper in all his undertakings, whether great or small. His reports, which periodically arrived in Gibeah, breathed obedience and devotion.

Saul felt his impotence, and the consciousness of it made him altogether rancorous. He cursed and swore from sheer malignity. He hoped, almost against hope, that something might be found which

would render dubious the character of David and proclaim him a wily if not a dangerous subject. One day such evidence was really placed into his hands by Paltiel.

That officer had worn a rather glum expression on his face of late. When the marriage of Merab with Adriel was announced, he had hoped that the king would think also of him, and, at last, reward him with Michal for whom he had waited so long. But Saul never said a word. There had been no double wedding. He seemed to be no nearer the goal than years ago. Rather, the princess had become more and more proud every day, and treated him with undisguised contempt. Paltiel, at times, found it difficult to control the sea of rage that stormed within him. He began to connect the refractoriness of the maiden with the person of David. It was true, Michal had never exactly liked him, but since that shepherd youth had put in an appearance in Gibeah, the girl had changed decidedly for the worse. Whenever he heard the tones of her harp, the thought plagued him: "Can it be possible that she loves David?"

They had been very intimate together. David was a handsome youth. It was not impossible that he had made an impression upon his pupil. More than once he was on the point of suggesting such a thing to Saul, but dearth of more direct evidence had so far invariably prevented him. At last a lucky chance confirmed his misgivings. When, on this particular day, he stood before the king, he had conclusive testimony in his hands to prove that David and Michal had an understanding. That knowledge he would use to his advantage. Confi-

dent in the possession of a terrible weapon he regarded his master with a rather solemn mien. Saul noticed it and looked at him expectantly.

"What is it?" he interrogated, when they were alone.

Paltiel fixed his eyes intently on the king and said firmly: "It concerns Michal."

Saul made an impatient gesture. He thought he knew why Paltiel came. Of course, his officer was to marry the princess, but there need be no hurry. He loved Michal more than all the rest of his children, and he did not exactly like to violate her feelings. Some day he had to use his parental authority, he knew that very well, but he was willing to grant her liberty yet a little longer.

"Oh, bother," the king exclaimed annoyed. "Exercise a little patience. You have my word. In due time I shall give her to you."

A faint smile—half compassion, half scorn—played upon the thin lips of the officer.

"And will the king's authority ultimately be respected?" he asked.

Saul looked at him in anger and amazement.

"It will!" he said curtly. "Now leave me."

Paltiel retained his place.

"Then the king my Lord will graciously listen to me a few moments longer," he declared. "I have made an important discovery."

Displeasure and curiosity fought for the upper hand in Saul's mind, and curiosity won.

"Speak," he commanded.

"Has the king ever asked himself," he continued, "why the princess so steadily refuses to become my wife?"

A haughty frown appeared on Saul's countenance. "She dislikes you—she hates you!" he retorted cruelly.

Paltiel did not wince.

"And is that the sole reason?" he persisted.

The king raised himself up.

"And what other reason could there possibly be?" he demanded menacingly.

Paltiel shrugged his shoulders.

"Is it not a fact," he went on, "that since David came to the court, Michal's antipathy to me increased almost daily?"

The king stared at the speaker with eyes that glowed like fiery coals.

"You mean to say—"

"Yes, my lord," the officer affirmed passionately, "I am convinced that the princess is David's betrothed!"

"The proof!" the monarch exclaimed fearfully. "The proof!"

"I have it," Paltiel rejoined undismayed, and, putting his right hand into his bosom, produced from thence a letter, which he triumphantly delivered to the king. "May the king read and judge."

Saul took the piece of paper and devoured its contents. He turned an ashen gray. His hands began to tremble; his knees began to shake.

"Treason," he whispered; "treason in my own household!" Then he turned upon his servant. "How did you obtain this note?" he demanded.

"David's messenger dropped it accidentally when he placed his master's report into my hands. He quickly picked it up and tried to hide it, but I per-

ceived his sudden fright, and, suspecting it to be something improper, took it away from him."

"Well done, Paltiel," the king remarked. "You have rendered me a great service. Ha! the scoundrel! The schemer! No wonder he remained calm when I gave Merab to Adriel. He probably breathed more freely when he heard of it. But wait, you rogue, now I know where to touch you! I pray you, Paltiel, leave me now. I must think this over. I shall call you as soon as I need you."

The officer departed in high spirits. "I scored today," he said to himself, and a malicious smile played upon his lips. "Now wait, proud princess, soon you will be mine."

An hour later Saul entered the apartments of Michal. His features were stern and forbidding. A threatening fire glowed in his eyes. The princess perceived it and felt ill at ease.

"My daughter," said the king, "I have made up my mind that, at the end of eight days, you become the wife of Paltiel."

Michal gave a start. Her large brown eyes grew larger still. Unspeakable terror was depicted on her face. Her lips parted and quivered involuntarily. Saul saw her fright, but no muscle relaxed in his rigid countenance.

"You understand?" he demanded.

Michal seemed petrified. No word came over her bloodless lips. She seemed not to comprehend. The king surveyed her with a malevolent look. Suddenly the veins began to swell at his temples. He resented the searching gaze of his child. It was evident that she thought him mad. Ha, the vixen!

He went forward a step and tried to take hold

of her arm, but the princess withdrew in time and now stood there, trembling like an aspen leaf.

"Father!" she cried.

Paul laughed a short, metallic laugh.

"You need not think me ill," he protested. "No, I never was more nearly well than now."

But father," the princess resumed incredulously, still retreating a little, "why did you grieve me so?"

"Did I grieve you?" the king returned scornfully. "Why, I only apprised you of your wedding."

Michal's color came and went.

"Oh, father," she pleaded, "pare me yet a little while."

"No," the king retorted decidedly, "no more deferring of the matter. There has been too much dilly-dallying already."

Michal's limbs refused to support her longer. Overcome with the suddenness of the announcement, she sank upon a divan and gave way to tears. Convulsive sobbings caused her body to shake and tremble that it was painful to behold. But Paul remained unmoved. He had perfectly calloused his soul.

"Why do you object so much to marrying Paltiel?" he asked dryly.

"Because I hate him!" the princess flared up, rising from her couch, and standing before her father with clenched fists. "I loathe and execrate him, for he is a cringing, fawning slave!"

The king's eyes glued themselves on hers.

"And is this the only reason you reject my faithful servant?" he inquired caustically.

Michal's face unclimbed. Her fortitude forsook her. A sudden fear paralyzed her entire person.

Did her father know? She quailed before his burning eyes and looked on the floor.

"There!" Saul snarled. "You dissimulating daughter. There! Read!" and with a scowl on his lips that betokened infinite contempt, he tossed her the letter from David. The princess, mechanically, picked it up with quivering fingers and read.

"You know the handwriting, do you?" proceeded the king. "Ha, who would have thought that in my own palace that cockatrice should find a nest to lay his eggs! Damn him! Now, mark it, my pretty daughter, you have just eight days to get ready for the wedding with Paltiel—no more respite beyond that. I have said it!"

With ponderous strides the king strode out of the chamber.

CHAPTER IX.

MENTAL STORMS

When Michal was alone, a feeling as of utter hopelessness came over her. She staggered listlessly to the door and secured it with a bolt. Then she dropped on her bed and fixed her eyes on the ceiling. She did not weep any more—her distress was too great for tears. Her teeth were set, and her lips compressed, only they twitched now and then as in an agony of pain.

So her dream had come to an end. She was to give up David—the man whom she loved; and she was to marry Paltiel—the man whom she scorned.

Her father had said so. There was no dodging the issue. Her father had spoken with a ring of finality. As surely as Merab had been joined to Adriel the Meholathite, would she be joined to that sycophant of an officer.

Would she? The maiden bounced from her bed and gnashed her strong white teeth. Again her hands clinched. She stamped with her foot on the floor and declared, wildly: "No, never!"

In her agitation she had crushed the letter of her beloved. She smoothed it tenderly and once more perused its contents. There were only a few short sentences, but they put new courage and determination into her soul. She was very glad that her father had not destroyed it. David wrote:

"My love:—Though the king's command has sent me far away, in spirit I am always at your side. When I awake in the morning, I think of you; when I retire in the evening, I dream of you: in all my undertakings the knowledge of your love upholds, inspires, and strengthens me. As earnestly as a hireling desires the shade, so do I long for the day when my banishment shall come to an end, for my heart is sick from love. Without you, life is barren and meaningless; with you, all nature blossoms, and blooms, and sings. Be happy, my beloved! May Jehovah keep you safe in his pavilion until the day when his lovingkindness shall give us favor in the eyes of the king! Ever faithful and true,

David."

The princess read and reread the simple lines. She kissed the signature again and vowed, resolutely, rather to die than to disappoint her betrothed. She must see her mother,—perhaps her mother would be able to advise her. And then she must see Jonathan. She would do all in her power to frustrate the designs of Paltiel.

The queen was in her apartments. Michal entered, and, without any preliminaries told her how matters stood between herself and David, and what her father had demanded of her but an hour ago. The queen listened to her sympathetically, and, when she had finished, said quietly: "I knew you loved David—and so does Jonathan."

"You did?"

"Yes; I myself divined it, and David confessed it to your brother."

"And you do not disapprove of it?"

The queen sighed.

"David is an upright man. Let us pray Jehovah that he change the heart of the king. I like to see my daughter happy." She softly stroked the head of her child that lay in her lap. "I like to see her marry the man she loves."

"Oh, mother," the princess murmured, "are not we women in a bad way? As it was in the times of Rachel and Leah, who were sold as chattel, so it is even now: we have neither portion nor inheritance in Israel. The meanest man may choose the woman he loves, but a woman must not have a will or wish of her own. Poor Merab, I know she loved Jehoram, but what would it have availed her to say so? Do you think, mother, that conditions will ever change?"

"I do not know," the queen replied thoughtfully.

"They must change," Michal exclaimed vehemently. "I, for one, am not going to submit to them. No, and if I have to die, I shall not submit."

"Child, child," the queen admonished alarmed. "Calm yourself—be still."

"No, mother," the princess persisted, "I mean it. I am not going to marry that Paltiel. I am going to marry David or no one!"

Michal had risen from the stool on which she had been sitting and now stood before her mother like an angry goddess, ready to lead an army of soldiers into battle. Her eyes flashed fire; her mien bespoke an unyielding determination. Her port and bearing inspired even the queen.

At that moment Jonathan came into the room. With unconcealed astonishment he viewed the ladies before him. What was the matter? He hesitated at the door, not knowing whether to approach or to withdraw. Before, however, he could quite make up his mind, Michal perceived him. Her fortitude immediately turned into confusion. With burning cheeks and downcast eyes she took a few steps toward him and flung her arms about his neck.

"Oh, Jonathan, I am glad that you have come," she said. "You must help me, won't you? I am in distress." Having said so, the princess seemed to become conscious again of the littleness of her strength. She clung to her manly brother and sobbed.

"Softly, softly, dear," Jonathan consoled her. "Tell me what is it. Who has offended you? So you are going to marry David or no one" (he had

overheard her last exclamation). "Well, and who objects?"

He kissed her forehead, loosened her arms tenderly, and pulled her to his side upon a divan in front of the queen.

"Oh, Jonathan," Michal began, "father has threatened to give me to Paltiel this day week."

The prince instantly became grave.

"He has? And why so suddenly?"

"Oh, it's to punish me. He has found out (blushingly) that David loves me, and has resolved to make short end of it. He was dreadfully angry when he called on me. Oh, I was so afraid of him."

"That looks serious," Jonathan reflected. "But how in the world did he find out about it?"

"He intercepted a letter from David, which revealed all."

"And you are to marry Paltiel within a week?"

"Yes, so the king says. But," she added passionately, and her eyes flashed flames: "I am not going to do it! No, I shan't do it! You must help me, brother mine, to foil the designs of that wheedling knave Paltiel."

Jonathan smiled at the violence of his sister. Then he turned grave again.

"Yes," he said, "I shall help you. Before David left I promised him to take good care of you. If I permitted Paltiel to claim you, I should poorly do my duty." He rose. "See that she does nothing unreasonable," he said to the queen. Then he shook his index-finger at his sister and went out.

That very evening Jonathan spoke to the king. He implored his father not to sacrifice the happiness of his daughter. But all his intercession was of no

avail. On the contrary, Saul turned furiously upon him and declared that the matter was settled, and that he would hear no more about it. The prince departed from his father humiliated and extremely mortified. His entreaties had made matters only worse for David and Michal. He took his bow and went out into the field. It was impossible for him to stay indoors, or associate with people, after such an altercation with the king. The wildest schemes flitted through his brain. The marriage must be prevented, no matter what the cost. He thought of giving a drug to his sister, a day or so before the time appointed, that would render her ill, if not unconscious, without, however, leaving any baneful effects. He even wondered whether he should not aid his friend to elope with his sister. But, of course, that would have made David an outlaw, and he neither wished his friend nor Michal to lead a life of outlawry and fear.

It was very late when Jonathan came home from roaming in the woods. He had found no means altogether satisfactory to him. Wroth with the king, with Paltiel and himself, he threw himself on his bed.

In the meantime, however, circumstances had developed that worked together for good to David, since they required his instant services. No sooner had Jonathan left his father, than a messenger arrived at the court post-haste who reported harrowing news. The Philistines were making another raid. Goliath of Gath had had a cousin. This man, whose colossal dimensions almost exceeded those of the giant whom David had slain, had rallied a formidable army and had sworn to wreak ven-

geance on Israel. At this disheartening report Saul and his advisers looked dismayed. It had taken them by surprise, for no such eventuality had been expected. They had thought the Philistines so completely vanquished, that for a long time to come they would keep the peace. As a consequence the bulk of the host had been disbanded. Only here and there a garrison had been placed throughout the land. The largest single force was that which David commanded, and he was a score of miles away from the districts which the Philistines were threatening to pillage. Still, his was the only force which could forthwith be employed.

When Saul realized his precarious position he chafed like a beast in its cage. There was no time to be lost. Every minute was precious. David was indispensable now. Why, he was the only man able to prevent a great national catastrophe. And he had but a few hours ago trampled on his choicest treasure! He had flung his letter at the feet of his daughter and given the latter to understand that after eight days she must marry his servant Paltiel. If David heard of these things, would he still remain loyal? Would he not rather laugh at his misfortune and promptly join the forces of the enemies of Israel? But that would mean indescribable disaster to the nation, nor was it altogether improbable that he would, if victorious, and were it only for a season, take by force what he had not been able to attain in a peaceful way. It was evident that he must deal differently with David now. To bind the young captain to his cause, he must go the length of calling him his son-in-law a second time and offering him Michal as a reward in case he

successfully coped with the dreaded foes. There always remained the possibility that, in the heat of the fray, David would lose his life.

Early next morning the king once more entered the apartments of Michal. He looked serious but not stern; grave, but not forbidding. The princess saluted her father courteously but with a certain reserve. Moreover, there was iron determination written on her forehead. Of course, Michal could not know her father's purpose. She thought that he came to repeat what he said on the day before. Well, she was prepared for him. Her eyes had not closed all night. Her mind was irrevocably made up. She would never, never renounce David. She would never, never wed Paltiel. Saul noticed her lofty, resolute mien, and his blood, lashed by chagrin and vexation, flowed faster through his veins. But he controlled himself.

"My daughter," he said, trying to give to his voice a pleasant sound, "you need not knit your brows in such a fashion. I have not come to torment you again, but rather to crave your pardon."

The king stopped, for his voice, in spite of himself, had become thick. Oh, it was so hard to speak on this wise when he had a thousand times rather used the words of authority and hurled the defiant wench before him on the floor. As for Michal, her surprise was profound. Her lips parted, and her large eyes became fixed on the eyes of her father, as though she wished to read the inmost recesses of his heart.

"It is even so," the king continued, clearing his voice. "I wronged you yesterday. I wronged David. He has been faithful and true. If you

really desire to marry him, I shall not put anything into your way."

"Father," Michal cried, still incredulous. "Are you really in earnest?"

"I am," the king responded. "You must forgive me for having been so harsh yesterday. You know, it came so suddenly, and then my illness—"

He was unable to say more, for Michal had flung herself on his bosom and covered his face with kisses.

"Oh, father, my own father!" she murmured, "how could I misjudge you so! I ought to have known it, and I knew it too, that you were not well, and yet I believed that you meant it. Forgive me that I wronged you so!"

Saul was strangely moved. He loved his daughter. Michal had been his darling. The sublime faith she placed in him gripped at his heart-strings. A momentary struggle ensued within his soul. Should he receive David in good faith as his son-in-law, and be done with it? The struggle was of short duration. He denounced, mentally, his own puerile weakness. No, no, David was his rival—his mortal foe. There could be no peace between him and that man. Since he knew that Samuel had poured on his head the anointing oil, David was and remained a competitor who must be gotten out of the way, whether by fair means or foul. To hide his dark thoughts Saul pressed the maiden to his bosom, for she must not look into his eyes right now.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself," he answered. "It comforts me greatly to find you so ready to forgive."

"Oh, father, don't speak of it anymore!"

"And you won't mention a thing to David of what occurred here yesterday?"

"How could I? No, I shall not breathe a word!"

"You are my own Michal," the king declared hypocritically. "Now you have rendered me perfectly happy. Do you still have that letter I treated so contemptuously?" he added.

Michal answered affirmatively.

"Then write a reply at once. Tell your betrothed that his prayer has found fulfillment already; that I bestow upon him my former favor; that I call him my son-in-law a second time, and hope to see him return as soon as the Philistines, which again are menacing our border, have been discomfited and chased back to their cities."

The king now told Michal more of the latest movements of the Philistines, and concluded graciously:

"You may tell David that he need not bring me any dowry. The only thing I require of him is that he make a full end of the enemy, and, if it is possible, bring me their vaunting leader, either dead or alive. That I shall consider more precious than any dowry in silver, or gold, or costly stones. The messenger who brought your letter yesterday, is still with us. He will return within an hour and may carry your message and mine."

The king, with a benignant smile on his face, left the chamber. Michal, for some brief moments, was disposed to think it all a dream. But no, she was awake—fully awake, and her eyes and ears had seen and heard too plainly. She rallied herself. What was it she wanted to do? Oh, yes, write a

letter! And she did not need to do it clandestinely. No, she could do it in the bright daylight—without fear of being observed. She had so many things to write—such good news to tell. Longer and longer the letter grew—she told David that his note had miscarried; and how good it had been; for now the king knew; and he was not displeased at all; on the contrary, he had been very kind. “The thought of Paltiel no more darkens my life. The king sanctions our union. Fight speedily the battles of Jehovah. Crush Israel’s foes under your heel. Take, if possible, that blustering giant—no further dowry you need. Make haste, for I long to see your countenance, I long to hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance manly and comely. Return speedily to your beloved.”

Saul, likewise wrote a letter to David, in which he charged him to make a full end of the pestiferous Philistines. “I have learned of your love for my daughter Michal,” he went on, “and it pleases me much. I wronged you in the case of Merab, and ask you to forgive it. Be victorious! Put down all that trouble the nation. Return with the leader of the Philistines as your dowry, and hesitate not to claim your betrothed.”

When David received the two letters he was, at first, very much astonished. The prospect held out to him was so dazzling, that he found it hard to believe it possible. Had Saul alone written, he would have suspicioned the sincerity of the offer; but Michal—his beloved Michal—wrote also. She fully trusted her father. It was evident—Saul had repented of his rash act and now intended to make amends. Well and good: he, David, would not be

slack in executing the behest of the king. The Philistines should not long vex the borders of Israel. He would with his own hand make captive their chief and hale him before Saul.

So David set out with his men. As he marched through towns and villages, he found the people in a high state of excitement. It was bruited about that the Philistines behaved like fiends; that they spared neither women nor children, and that they burned and destroyed whatever they could not take along. Just now they were harassing the district of Laish. Flushed with their easily won victories, gorged with an immense amount of booty, they thought themselves the lords of creation. Day by day they became more cruel. Their chief called himself Dagon, after one of the gods of their nation. He was, indeed, a man of colossal stature. Nothing, so it was reported, delighted him more than to torture and torment his captives. He had ordered some to be flayed alive. Others he had sawn asunder with iron saws. Still others he had mangled and quartered.

David's heart was bleeding at the stories he heard. Nearer and nearer he marched his army. His spies ascertained that Dagon's following was much smaller than had at first been assumed. It was no army at all—it was only a marauding party of some five or six hundred men. David, with his force of a thousand men, was much superior in strength.

When the exact position of the pillagers had been ascertained, David made his arrangements for their destruction. In the stillness of night he completely surrounded their camp. In the early morning, just as it began to dawn, he gave the command

to attack. The Philistines were wholly surprised. A panic ensued at once. A perfect victory was obtained. Only a few of the foes escaped.

David's ambition had been to engage the leader of the horde. It was not difficult to single him out amongst his men, for his extraordinary height was too prominent. Boiling with resentment at the atrocities committed by Dagon, David challenged him to single combat. With a furious growl the giant greeted the challenge and approached in great haste. But David was on his guard. A stone from his never-failing sling sent the colossus reeling to the ground. But the man was not dead. He was only stunned. Before, however, he regained consciousness, the Israelites had bound him securely with ropes.

And now the victors made haste to return to Gibeah. David was burning with impatience to see his betrothed. He dispatched a messenger with news to Saul that the Philistine terror existed no more; that the chief of the band had been captured alive, and would be delivered into his hands tomorrow; and that he himself was on his way home to pay his respects to the king.

The distance to be covered between Laish and Gibeah was about twenty miles. David's messenger arrived just as it began to grow dark. When Saul heard his report he was scarcely able to repress his rage. So his rival had again been successful. The harper returned with laurels and glory. The expedition had but increased his fame. Drunk with victory, he came home at the head of a mighty band, that fairly worshipped him. The situation was exasperating. What should he do? It was danger-

ous to deceive David a second time. If he raised the standard of revolt, many might be found to side with him. There was no other way—much as he loathed it: he must give his daughter to that shepherd lad.

Saul writhed and fretted at the thought of David's sure and steadfast ascent to distinction and honor. In very truth, Jehovah was with that man. Whatever he undertook to do, prospered in his hands. He behaved himself with discretion and wisdom. There was no flaw in his life that one could seize upon. He was above criticism in all his ways.

When David arrived on the following day, the king had made up his mind. He would yield for the moment. He would receive him with friendly show, but would secretly lay plans to take his life. Having first rocked him into security, it would be so much more easy to dispose of him. Thus David was welcomed with great magnanimity. The king praised his prowess before all the people and announced that three days later his daughter Michal would be given him as a fit reward for his valor.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE THE WEDDING

The days that followed were days of perfect bliss for both David and Michal. They needed no longer to conceal their love. In all the heaven of their happiness, no cloud could be seen: kindness, sympathy, and good will were in evidence every-

where. The sole exception was Paltiel. When, accidentally, he crossed the way of the blithesome couple, he curled his lips in hate and defiance. But the merry lovers took no notice of his frown. They had too many pleasant things to think about. Many an hour they spent in the arbor that had heard the first whisperings of their love. They sang and played together and drank in full draughts from the cup of happiness that had so suddenly been given into their hands.

"I loved you from the first moment I saw you," Michal confessed on the second afternoon as they thus sat together. "No sooner had you crossed the threshold than your picture was engraved on my heart as with an indelible stencil."

"It was the same with me," David owned, drawing her tenderly to his breast. "You thrilled me the minute I looked into your eyes."

"It's strange," the princess mused. "To be honest, I asked you to teach me to play on the harp, not so much because I cared to learn that art, although I did like the music; but rather because I just longed for your presence."

"There, there!" David rebuked gently, though his eyes sparkled with joy.

"Yes, it is the simple truth," Michal affirmed. "I was not wholly conscious of it at the time, but I understand the real motive perfectly now."

The young man imprinted an ardent kiss upon the lips of the lovely speaker.

"God has wonderfully directed our paths," he said devoutly. "For a while the heavens were covered with thick dark clouds. We hardly knew what to do. An impassable gulf yawned between

us two and mocked at our bridals. Now the clouds have been scattered and the gulf has been bridged—the king, who was my enemy, has become my friend, and you who were so far removed, are sitting at my side.”

“Yes, it is true,” the princess nodded. “My mother, this morning, wept for joy. Oh, she is preparing such a sumptuous wedding for us.”

“There is but one thing,” David resumed, “that fills me with a little apprehension. I encountered Paltiel again this morning. He scowled at me quite menacingly. I fear his wounded pride will goad him on to deeds of vengeance.”

Michal’s face, momentarily, grew overcast.

“He ought not to have fed his mind with illusive hopes,” she said impatiently. “I never encouraged him. On the contrary, I showed him my antipathy on every occasion.”

“Granted,” David rejoined, “but remember that parents often do not consult the feelings of their daughters. Think of Merab! Did not the king promise her to me?” The young man blushed slightly. “Did not the king give her to Adriel? Thus you were promised to Paltiel. Methinks, the man is worthy of our sympathy.”

Michal’s face grew darker still.

“I hope,” said she, “that some day women will be free; that some day they will be able to choose for themselves. In the past, they have been little better than slaves. Again and again fathers have bartered their daughters for what seemed of value to them. It is wrong! Women have souls as well as men. They love as men love; they have affections as men have; they feel as men feel.”

Steps approached. The lovers looked at each other questioningly. Who came to their bower? Before either of them could speak a word, Jonathan appeared in the entrance.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "I have been looking for you everywhere. But," continued he, "you look so serious. Have you been talking over some differences?" He took a seat.

"Not that," replied David suavely. "We happened to think of Paltiel, and, in connection with him, Michal expatiated on women's rights."

The princess blushed faintly.

"Yes, yes," her brother put in, "Michal is always harping on that string. But she is right just the same. Moses says that woman was taken out of man, not, indeed, out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled under foot; but out of his side to be equal to him, from under his arm to be protected, and from near his heart to be beloved. I believe in equal rights for the sexes. We shall never have a generation of great men until we have a generation of great women."

"You express my own sentiments," David agreed. "Does not our nation boast some wonderful women? Think of Miriam, the sister of Moses; was she not a prophetess? Think of Deborah, of Naomi and Ruth and of the mother of Samuel? There was a time when physical force and brute strength gave pre-eminence. The position of the strong depended upon their muscles, their brawn, their courage. Woman, at that stage of civilization, could not cope with man, for she is physically the weaker vessel. But a time will come when intelligence will take the place of force—a time will come when con-

science restrains the muscle—a time will come when reason will reign supreme. When that time arrives brute force will be esteemed as nothing: moral elements, spiritual qualities, intellectual achievements shall then have the palm.”

Michal had listened with rapture to the words of her beloved.

“How you can talk,” she murmured. “Who was it taught you sentiments like these?”

“Samuel,” the shepherd lad responded simply. “It is true, we did not at the time talk about women’s rights, but what he said applies also here. I do hope that woman will not continue to be the plaything of man. I hope that she will get equal rights, equal education, equal advantages.”

“How came you to meet Samuel?” Jonathan asked.

“He once was guest in my father’s house, after the celebration of a sacrifice,” David answered, coloring slightly. “I made his acquaintance and thereupon called on him a number of times in his house at Ramah.”

“Is not the prophet a very stern man?” Jonathan resumed after a short pause. He thought of the scene on Gilgal’s height, where Samuel had unsparingly rebuked the king his father.

“He is,” David replied, “in questions where Jehovah’s honor is involved. But otherwise he is very gracious, gentle and mild.”

A brief silence ensued. Each one followed the train of his own thoughts. Jonathan was first to speak.

“How grave our conversation has become,” he remarked, slapping his thigh. “Now let’s talk about

something else. Do you know that you will have the most magnificent wedding ever celebrated in Israel?"

"Do you really think so?" Michal asked, glowing for joy.

"It's a fact. You will be surprised. Scores of men are busy night and day. The queen is spending enormous sums of money. You, David, will be delighted, for she has invited all the soldiers that accompanied you on your recent ventures."

David's eyes sparkled.

"Is it true?" he asked.

"Quite true. It will be a great day. The only thing that makes me anxious, is the behavior of the king. He does not look well. Repeatedly, I saw him put his hand to his head as though he were tormented by pain. I hope that his affliction may not return."

"Poor father!" Michal murmured sympathetically.

David sighed.

Jonathan had seen correctly. King Saul was in anything but a happy frame of mind. To force himself to maintain a pleasant face when his soul writhed under convulsions of hate, proved a greater strain on his constitution than he had surmised. And now these preparations for the marriage feast! True, he had given the queen a free hand. He had told her to superintend all the arrangements. But that she went to the unprecedented lengths that she did aroused his ire. Already the people talked of David more than enough. Why, therefore, increase his popularity?

There were moments when he felt like calling a

halt—when he was on the verge of breaking his promise; but he lacked the courage. He asked himself what the people would do if he took such a course. They were in a state of great excitement. To offend them in their present mood was, to say the least, impolitic. Mortifying as it was, he must wait for better opportunity to get even with that shepherd lad.

He began to hate all those who showed regard for David. His foolish son Jonathan was nourishing an adder that would sting him to death! The queen was making a bed for the man who would despoil her son of the throne!

As he paced his chamber on the afternoon that preceded the nuptial festivities, Saul's indignation almost broke the dams and sluices that confined it.

"They are all blind," he groaned. "They are all blind. I alone have detected the basilisk. I alone see him putting out his venomous fangs. Ha, I shall break them off—yes, I shall break them off, and the serpent I shall crush under my heels!"

At that moment Paltiel entered.

"The house of Jesse has arrived," he announced sententiously.

The king stopped abruptly in his walk. He cast a cryptic glance at the man who had served him so many years. Paltiel had been ever faithful to him. Now what had he received for his services? He had promised him Michal, but Michal was, on the following day, to be given to another. A hot wave of shame and chagrin surged to the face of the king.

"Did you think to delight me with that news?" he said peevishly.

"Why should it not delight the king to see the

father of his son-in-law?" Paltiel answered morosely.

Saul's ill humor increased.

"Are you mocking me?" he retorted indignantly.

The servant looked his master straight in the face. His reproachful eyes rested long and accusingly upon the king's. Thus he stood and gazed, but vouchsafed no reply. Saul hung his head.

"Paltiel," he said, "you are the only one whom I can trust. You know the dilemma I was in. I simply had to give Michal to David. But do not think that I have done it gladly, or that I mean him to keep her. No," he hissed, and his voice sank to a whisper, "I hate David more than tongue can tell. I hate him mortally, and I want to get rid of him. Help me to get rid of him—to get him out of the way, and you shall yet lead Michal home!"

Paltiel's face became hideous with wild anticipation.

"My lord means—?" he faltered.

"I mean that David must die!" Saul cried furiously.

An infernal smile illuminated the visage of the servant. He understood. Long ago he had conjectured that the king was hatching mischief. He was quite sure that once already his master had attempted the life of David. On the day that the young man had so speedily left the presence of the king, Paltiel had noticed that a new rug had been suspended from the wall exactly where David had been standing when he began to play. He discovered a little later that the plaster behind it was cracked and contained two holes. Had the king,

in a fit of passion, hurled his javelins at the musician? He was almost sure of it.

"Paltiel," Saul continued, whilst a sinister fire gleamed in his eyes, "you are the only true servant I have—the only man in whom I confide. Help me to get this minstrel out of the way! Of course, it must be done in such a manner that no occasion is afforded for doubt and suspicion. Poison him! See that an accident occurs! Let him break his neck! Anything will do if it rids me of the man. What say you?"

"It shall be done!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEDDING FEAST

The third day arrived. The preparations for the great marriage feast were almost completed. Immense tables had been placed everywhere in the court-yard of the palace. Oxen and fatlings had been provided. Wine was to be served without measure to all who attended the banquet. There was an abundance of food.

The royal household and more distinguished guests were to eat in a large hall which had been embellished for the occasion. There were hangings of white cloth, of green cotton, and of blue satin, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to rings of silver and pillars of polished cedar. There were soft couches of all sizes, covered with precious

rugs of a great variety. Never had any beheld such splendor.

In the afternoon the guests gathered. Without in the court-yard were the one thousand soldiers over whom David was captain, and in the great hall the king and the queen, the groom and the bride, the household of Jesse, and the princes and generals sat round the festive board.

It was the queen who had secretly sent for David's parents and brothers. The happy groom felt very grateful for the consideration shown. With filial pride he presented his father and mother to the king, who greeted them quite cordially.

Michal was perfectly happy. Her eyes beamed with joy and gladness. More than one eye was attracted by the loveliness of her face, and the grace and winsomeness of her deportment.

The banquet began. The queen viewed with evident satisfaction the sumptuousness of the feast, and the gaiety of the guests. It was her work. Her kindly eye rested benignantly upon the simple woman—David's mother—at her side.

"Are they not a magnificent pair?" she whispered proudly.

"They are," nodded the simple woman, and her noble face lit up with joy.

As the feast proceeded, the general hilarity increased. Wine, music, and dainty dishes combined to make everybody sparkle with glee. Toast upon toast was proposed by eloquent speakers. David's deeds of valor, and the bride's beauty and charms, were duly praised.

Without in the court-yard the common soldiers imitated the example given by the nobility within.

A wandering gleeman had composed a song in which the exploits of the groom were eulogized. It was sung according to a familiar tune and every stanza concluded with the refrain:

“David, the hero of Israel!”

In the hall within the body of the song could not be understood, but the refrain reached the ear of every guest, for the soldiers, by degrees, had joined in the singing and thus multiplied the voice of the bard a thousand fold.

After the song a prolonged silence ensued without. Someone was addressing the revelers. Presently a shout went up as of an army going to battle:

“Long live David, the savior of the nation!”

At the festive board every voice became hushed, and every eye was fixed, in admiration, upon the recipient of all this praise. Only two men did not smile, but rather scowled—Paltiel, who, though not sitting at the nuptial board, watched the banquet from a distance, and Doeg, the chief of Saul’s herdsmen and Paltiel’s friend, who had his place near the foot of the table. Paltiel hated David because of the bride stolen from him, and Doeg hated the happy groom both on account of that fact, and, in addition, from sheer envy and malice. He always felt bad when he saw another succeed. Thus he hated David from downright malice.

When the voices without subsided, Jonathan rose to his feet and lifted high his goblet. With sparkling eyes and fluent tongue he rehearsed the deliverances wrought by his brother-in-law, and urged the whole company to drink to his health and further success. The guests, with one accord, obliged the worthy prince.

At the head of the table, the king turned pale with chagrin and vexation. He squeezed the golden cup in his hand as if he were minded to break it. His indignation assumed monumental proportions. He was almost beside himself with frenzy and hate. What a fool his son was—what a short-sighted fool! Did he not know that by elevating David he lowered himself? Did he not know that by extolling the captain at his side, he undermined the pedestal that supported his throne? Saul felt like overthrowing the festive table. He just hankered to give free course to his pent-up rage. His hands trembled with desire to grasp the biggest vessel before him and project it crashing into the radiant face of his youthful son-in-law.

The queen, who suddenly became aware of the agitation of her husband, bent to him an inquiring face.

"What ails my lord?"

Saul collected himself.

"It's nothing," he answered. "I am feeling better already. Don't worry."

But the queen did worry. Anxiously she watched the behavior of the king. She said to herself that her husband was worse than he was willing to own. His hands were nervous—quite nervous. His movements were by jerks. The color on his face came and went. Moreover, he emptied his goblet quite freely.

More people began to notice the king's condition. Here and there the guests put their heads together and whispered to one another: "It's the evil spirit!"

The mirth at the board subsided. The guests, as by agreement, spoke only in subdued tones.

Soon there reigned a dead and funereal silence throughout the spacious hall. Everybody felt uneasy, when, suddenly, loudly, mightily, as the blast of the trumpet upon the hush of the grave, rose a single voice. All started—all turned—all looked in one direction; and they saw, that the great voice pealed from the main entrance of the hall. Here stood a tall, gaunt man of engaging and heroic presence. In his hands he held a diminutive harp, and with a voice that pealed through the hall like a bell, he sang a merry lay. No words can describe the excitement which his song produced on the guests. All discomfort and disquietude had dissolved like a mist before the sun. The previous cheerfulness returned as by magic.

When the minstrel concluded his song, a hundred voices and more, vouchsafed unstinted applause. The king, who was no longer able to endure the hilarity, embraced this opportunity to retire unobserved, followed solely by the queen. When the guests, after a while, looked again toward the head of the table, the king's place was empty.

Saul withdrew to his inmost chamber. He dismissed the queen unceremoniously and charged her to command Jonathan to appear before him as soon as the banquet broke up. The queen departed with a sigh and great apprehensions. On her return to the hall she had a servant announce that the king was ill. But she admonished the guests, on that account, not to shorten their stay: rest and quiet would soon restore their royal master. Notwithstanding, the retirement of Saul had its effect. The festivities terminated before the midnight hour,

though Jonathan had taken the place of his father and radiated kindness everywhere.

When the last guests had left the hall, Jonathan repaired to the king. The queen had made known to him the behest of his father, and the prince was filled with anxiety and expectation.

In the meantime, Saul, gloomily, paced his chamber. Now and again he gnashed his teeth, and his lips muttered imprecations. His thoughts grew darker and darker. Occasionally, when some sounds of the feast reached his ears, he would stop in his walk and furiously stamp on the floor.

"Be merry! Gladden his heart! Turn his head with flattery and praise! I still am king! I shall crush your darling!"

At intervals the king halted before a table on which a big bottle of wine and a large goblet had been placed. In huge draughts he drank of the fiery beverage, which, coursing through his blood and rising to his head, caused wilder and wilder thoughts to pass through his brain.

At last, fatigued from his wandering, and overcome with the liquor, he sat down on a couch. Oh, how his head hammered and throbbed! He held it in both his hands and tried to think more calmly. Soon Jonathan would come. It was necessary that he collect his thoughts. He would tell his son the whole truth. He would tell him of David's anointing by Samuel. He would tell him that David was his rival to the throne. Surely, once Jonathan knew all, he would repudiate the friendship of the shepherd lad and kill him with his own hands.

When Jonathan entered, Saul was again pacing his chamber. He was talking loudly to himself, and

gesticulating vehemently. The prince turned pale. He realized at once that his father was very ill. What should he do? Should he call in the physicians?

While he still mused, the afflicted man made a turn in the chamber and now fixed his eyes on his son, but evidently without recognizing his presence. His hands outstretched, he exclaimed in a voice of mingled anguish and wrath:

"He prevails against me! He spreads a net for my feet! He binds me with the yoke of my transgressions! Ah, me—my strength fails! He has shamed me in the sight of my people! He has given my glory to another! My enemies have heard of my trouble, and they rejoice on account of it! Curse him! Let his name perish! Let his inheritance be given to strangers, and his house to aliens!"

In great horror Jonathan took his father in his arms and led him gently to a couch. Slowly the king came to himself. He recognized the prince.

"Ah," he said, "it is you!" Then he passed his hand over his head. "Sit in front of me," he added after a short pause.

Jonathan did so. With a slight shudder he perceived the dark frown on the king's forehead, and the leering glance that issued from the mysterious depths of his eyes.

"You are ill, father," he remarked hesitatingly.

The cloud on Saul's face waxed larger and darker.

"Ill? Yes!" he growled. "And who but a fool can remain well at beholding the honor that is heaped on the head of that son of Jesse! You are a simpleton, my son, in bestowing your love on that

man. He is your enemy—your mortal foe; but you are blind as a bat and do not know it.”

Jonathan knitted his brow. What was his father driving at? Annoyed and displeased he rose from his seat.

“Sit down,” the king declared angrily. “I want to speak to you. I want to open your eyes. I repeat what I said: you are a ninny! If you were no ninny you would not have added your voice to the voices of those who sang the praises of David. Cannot you see that he is your rival? Cannot you see that he aspires to the throne?”

“Father!” the prince cried, rising once more from his seat.

“Yes, you doltish son of mine, it is even so. Don’t you remember what the women sang at our return from the slaughter of the Philistines? Did they not ascribe ten thousand to David, and to me but one thousand? Now, what can he have more than the kingdom? And again tonight: have they not extolled him to the sky? Have they not called him the savior of the nation? What say you now? Do not the people care more for David than for you and me?”

Jonathan was unable to reply. He stood rooted to the floor and looked, in great terror, on the speaker. The king resumed.

“But there is no need to conjecture—there is no need to merely surmise. I have evidence; do you hear? evidence! I know it that David is your rival and mine, for Samuel the prophet has anointed him to be prince over Israel. Ha, do you remember that scene on Gilgal’s height, where I stood disgraced before the entire host? Do you remember

he words that fell from Samuel's lips—"The kingdom has been rent from thee, and Jehovah has given it to another, more worthy than thou"? That man is David."

The monarch stopped exhaustedly. His rolling eyes seemed to devour the prince who stood like a statue before him. He waited for an answer, but Jonathan's lips remained closed.

"Listen, therefore, to my advice," the king proceeded, and his voice became a whispering hiss, "this harper must die!"

At this announcement life came again into the form of the prince. He recoiled from the king as though an adder had leaped at him. His face assumed a haggard look. His eyes protruded from their sockets.

"Hush, father," he exclaimed in horror. "You wrong David—you wrong him egregiously. You are prejudiced against him. Paltiel has sullied his name!"

"No," the king fumed, "I wrong him not, nor am I prepossessed. Have not you heard that I told you I had the proofs of his crookedness? There is a secret agreement between him and the prophet. Tremble, you simple-minded son of mine! David has been anointed by Samuel as my successor to the throne! Get that?"

"And who told you such a tale?"

"You doubt my words? Ha, has it come to such a pass already? Listen then—his own father revealed the secret! Nay, better still, that fellow, whom you call your friend—oh, the shame of it! The disgrace of it!—was hard enough, bold enough, brazen enough to chant it into my own ears, that

Jehovah had anointed his head with oil! The villain! But it is enough! He must die—die say, and you yourself must slay him!”

Jonathan was spared a reply, for his father, at that moment, was seized by a violent paroxysm, and fell backward upon his couch. His mighty frame writhed and quaked that it was a pity to behold. The convulsions lasted for a few minutes and then gave place to perfect exhaustion. A death-like stupor subdued his violence, and held it in leash. Terror-stricken, the prince left the chamber.

“Oh, God!” he whispered, “what infamy! What infernal plots and schemes!”

He shook himself. It seemed as though the very air reeked with murder and crime.

CHAPTER XII.

A TRUE FRIEND

That night Jonathan did not close his eyes. His mind was in a tempest. The horrible things he had heard banished all repose and sleep. He thought and thought, and thought. What was to be done? David anointed by Samuel to be prince over Israel. Was it possible? Was it possible that any collusion existed between the seer and his friend?

He remembered David's remark in the arbor. Samuel had been at the house of Jesse. David had repeatedly seen the prophet. Now was it true that the latter had poured on his head the oil of anointing

and, in case this had been done, did David attach any such meaning to the act as his father implied?

These two things he must find out. If David had been anointed and interpreted the rite in the light of the words of the king, and yet had concealed it from him, his soul was not without guile. But Jonathan was inclined to disbelieve the whole story. Surely, the king had been erroneously informed. As for the psalm in which his friend spoke of the anointing with oil, that, evidently, was but a poetic figure of speech.

He was convinced of one thing: David was no schemer. No, he was honor itself. He was upright and virtuous—without dissimulation and pretense. There was neither servility nor the faintest aspect or tone of defiance in his manner or bearing toward the king. On every occasion he had simply taken the tasks assigned him and wrought out their details with wisdom and care. For this he had received well earned praise.

It was folly in his father to hate such a man—to think that he was crooked—to believe that he aimed at selfish ends. No, David must be protected—defended. He would have a talk with the king next morning. When the wine was gone from him, he would listen to reason. His father was not unjust. The evil spirit had possessed him. The fumes of the wine had befogged his brain. When the effect of the liquor had subsided, he would remind the king of David's deeds of valor—of the way he had offered his life for the salvation of the nation and glory of the throne.

But first he would have a talk with David himself. He would find out whether there was any

truth to Saul's charges. If collusion existed between him and the prophet—if he had been anointed as the future king—why had he so unadvisedly mentioned Samuel's name a day or two ago in the arbor? The king must be mistaken. It only remained to produce the proofs.

Quite early Jonathan rose from the couch on which he had spent the night, and stepped out into the garden. The pleasant morning air cooled his burning temples and caused his turbulent blood to flow slower through his veins. Not a soul was stirring. Silence reigned everywhere. He viewed the palace and scanned the curtained windows behind which the happy pair were sleeping.

"Jehovah bless you and keep you!" came from his lips. "It is good that your soul dreams of no harm. Sleep on, happy ones, I shall make your cause my own."

Again he sauntered on. Deeper and deeper he went into the garden, until, at length, he came to the lonely bower, with which we are acquainted already. He entered, took a seat, and mused. Gradually his eyelids grew heavier and heavier. Nature craved its right, and the prince made no effort to resist. He laid his tired head on the table before him, and, after a little while, was soundly asleep. . . .

Presently he roused himself. How long he had slept he could not tell. Voices had waked him from his slumber. When he opened his eyes and looked about, he beheld David and Michal in the door of the arbor, each carrying a harp.

"You here, Jonathan, and asleep?" the princess queried surprised.

The prince rubbed his eyes.

"It appears so," he replied amusedly. "I believe I have slept. But come in! Have a seat! Ah, how tired I was. I did not sleep a wink last night. I see you brought your harps along. That is excellent. Come, play to me one of your choicest selections."

David and Michal took seats.

"What shall we play to you?" David asked of the prince.

A thought occurred to Jonathan.

"Play me the shepherd psalm," he said.

"Very well."

The music poured forth from the instruments and two sweet voices, blended almost into one, chanted the wonderful words:

"Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Thou hast anointed my head with oil, my cup runneth over."

Jonathan listened with rapt emotion. There was such a charm—such a subtle fascination about that melody that it never failed to bewitch and transport those who heard it.

"David," he said softly at the end of the song, "what do you mean by the words: 'Thou hast anointed my head with oil'? Is that but a figure of speech, or do you refer to some actual occurrence—be it in your life or the life of some one else?"

When he asked this question—so innocent in itself—the prince fixed his eyes intently upon the face of his friend. He perceived that the color rose

to David's cheeks, and that his eyes looked on the ground. Jonathan's pulses throbbed. He was fully persuaded that a tale lay hid in the words.

"Was it indiscreet of me to ask that question?" he murmured, whilst a hot wave surged into his temples.

David locked up. There was a dreamy expression in his eyes as they rested upon Jonathan.

"Why should I not reveal to you the meaning of these words?" he said. "Are you not my friend? Is not my soul pledged to your soul? No, these words are not to be understood in a figurative sense—they have reference to an actual event in my own life."

And then David rehearsed his anointing at the hands of Samuel, and the seer's prediction that Jehovah had chosen him to achieve great things for the nation.

"I doubted his words for a long time," he resumed, "but all that the prophet declared has come to pass. Goliath is dead, the Philistines are vanquished, and Dagon, who but of late overran our land, is fettered and helpless in the power of the king."

"Then the prophet indicated nothing definite?" the prince asked thoughtfully.

"No," David replied abstractedly. "Nothing definite. Once he was on the point of speaking plainly, but he checked himself. He bade me to wait. But now that Jehovah has used my service, I do not clearly perceive why the seer threw round it such a veil of mystery."

"Perhaps you are destined for another work still in the future?" the prince put in.

"Do you think so?" David mused.

"Quite probably."

"Then we must wait still. As for me, I am ready to do the bidding of Jehovah!"

Jonathan rose. The tension in his face had relaxed. Smooth was his forehead and pleasant the gleam in his eye. If the shade of the shadow of a doubt had flitted through his mind, David's artless narration had dispelled it forever. He must make haste to see the king. He must tell him that though his friend had been anointed by Samuel, he was far from connecting the rite with the throne. The king would listen and repent himself. He laid his hand on the young man's shoulder and said, deeply moved:

"As Jehovah has been with you hitherto, so may he be with you in the days to come."

Thereupon he left the arbor and the happy pair were left alone.

It was late in the forenoon of that day when Saul awoke with a start. He had had a nightmare. In his dreams he had seen himself haunted by David. The young man had stood in his presence, playing on his harp. Now there had been something about his aspect which had struck terror to the king's soul. It had not been his physical valor or power, no, it had been something else. There had been such a mystifying look in the young man's face. It was the face that had haunted the king like a ghostly revelation. The face had beamed with wisdom, darkened with unexplained apprehension, frowned as in a spirit of judgment.

When Saul opened his eyes, he looked wildly about in the room as though he feared the shepherd

lad were in fact present with his harp. But the chamber was empty. He laid his hand upon his eyes and tried to think. Slowly memory returned. He recalled the wedding and all that occurred at the feast. He also remembered the interview he had had with Jonathan. Confound it! How could he have been so foolish as to reveal his designs to the prince who fairly doted upon David! He ought to have known beforehand that Jonathan would never agree to a plot to destroy his friend—no, not to save his throne!

The king rose stiffly from his couch. Ah, how heavy his hand was, and how dull and confused his thoughts!

"I must talk to that simpleton," he said to himself. "He will spoil everything. Perhaps he has already spoken to David, and the villain has taken to his heels and fled. Ha, that would, indeed, be the limit!"

Hurriedly he made his toilet and ate a morsel of bread. From the servant who waited on him he learned that David and Michal had been seen to go into the garden. At this intelligence the king breathed a sigh of relief. Then they did not yet know anything. Jonathan had not warned them. Peradventure he had made an impression upon him after all.

Nothing was lost yet. He would speak to his son and find out which way he leaned. If he opposed the contemplated assassination, he would forthwith retract everything said on the previous night. He would assure him that his friend was perfectly safe. Saul was still reflecting as to how he would begin

and what he would say when the prince, unannounced, entered his room.

Jonathan looked very grave. He approached and saluted the king, who as seriously returned the salutation.

"I am glad you have come," Saul opened the conversation. "I was just going to summon you."

Jonathan vouchsafed no reply: silently, wistfully, he regarded the speaker, who, after some painful moments, resumed:

"What was it, my son, I said to you last night?"

"You spoke of foul murder," the prince returned sternly, and the blood welled up to his head.

"Did I?" the king answered, looking on the floor. He realized that his arguments had not prevailed upon his son. On the contrary, Jonathan, so it appeared, was now come to defend his friend. Knowing his ground, Saul chose his words accordingly. "I believe I did speak of murder," he admitted wearily. "I was beside myself with jealousy. I thought of the future; I thought of the throne; I thought of you."

"But your jealousy is unfounded," Jonathan urged warmly. "There is no reason to think that David aspires to the throne."

The king raised his eyes and gazed on his son.

"Have not I told you?" he said testily, yielding, for the moment, to the wrath that seethed in his soul, "that David has been anointed?"

"Well, what of it?" the prince retorted boldly. "May it not be that you put a wrong construction upon the rite? Why should the ceremony be connected with the throne? David himself has told me of his anointing at the hands of the prophet,

but he, in no wise, understands it to mean that he is destined to rule. He believes it was but to qualify him for the encounter with Goliath of Gath."

Saul, involuntarily, gave a start when he learned that David had spoken of his anointing to Jonathan. The rascal! Ah, he was cunning! He had surely done it to forestall detection. And his foolish son divined no harm. It was maddening! The ceremony was to be in no wise connected with the throne? Ha, he knew better! No layman had ever been anointed by Samuel. He himself was the first on whom the oil had been poured, and it had signified that Jehovah had chosen him to be prince over his people. Now David had been anointed in exactly the same fashion. What further proof, therefore, was necessary? Jonathan's words, instead of allaying the tumult in the bosom of the king, served but to swell and augment it, since they confirmed the report of Paltiel. But Saul was wise enough not to betray himself.

"David told you himself?" he asked with feigned surprise.

"He did!"

"Hm," murmured the king. "That does not indicate a guilty conscience. Could it be possible that the anointing may mean something else?"

"Without a doubt," Jonathan put in ardently. "Let not the king believe that David is false! Has he committed but one act that deserves reproof or punishment? Nay, all his works have been noble and worthy of praise. When you were ill, it was David who banished the affliction with melodies soft and sweet; when Israel cowered in the presence of the foe and your own courage failed and took wings,

it was David who put his life in his hands and smote the giant of Gath; again and again David has delivered the nation: you have seen it yourself and have rejoiced. Wherefore, then, will you sin against innocent blood, to slay my friend without a cause?"

The king rose from his seat and paced the room. Presently he halted before his son. His features were drawn. The corners of his mouth twitched convulsively. In his eyes there gleamed a cryptic fire.

"David shall not die," he said. "I have sinned in seeking his hurt."

"Father!" Jonathan cried half rejoicingly, half doubtfully.

"I swear it to you by Jehovah, he shall not die!" the king repeated. "Now leave me alone, I pray you, for I am fatigued."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLIGHT

A week passed in comparative quietness. Saul had given David a house in the southern part of Gibeah. Here the young couple lived in perfect happiness. Jonathan had not breathed a word to his friend concerning the danger that had lurked so near. Why spoil his bliss? Thus David remained in ignorance that once again his life had been threatened. He believed the king to be his

friend. With thankful heart he dwelt in the house which had been given him. In the company of Michal he forgot all the trials of the past.

One day the king was reported ill. Toward evening a messenger came to David and told him that Saul desired to hear him play on the harp. David readily consented. He picked up his instrument and went on the way to give relief to his ailing father-in-law. He found the king alone, reclining on a divan.

"Here I am," David said when he entered. "What can I do for my lord the king?"

"Jehovah bless you," Saul replied. "It is well that you have come so soon. Play to me, I pray you, some sweet melody on your harp. I have not been feeling well of late."

Anyone beholding the king could see at a glance that he spoke the truth. He looked altogether miserable. It seemed to be a mental ailment that plagued him, for his forehead was furrowed deeply, and the whole expression of his face betokened extreme anguish. David's sympathy was instantly touched. Softly he plied his instrument. He played with a devotion scarcely ever equaled before, meanwhile watching the face of the king for a sign of improvement or commendation. To his astonishment no such sign was bestowed. On the contrary, Saul's features grew tenser and harder. They assumed such a perfectly sinister shading that David, unconsciously, placed himself on guard. This was his luck, for, all of a sudden, the sick man reached under his pillow, produced from thence a javelin, and hurled it fiercely at the musician, who stood no farther than ten cubits away from him.

Had David not sprung aside, the terrible weapon would doubtless have pierced his heart.

For a moment David remained rooted to the spot from fright. He had not looked forward to such a deed. So Saul was still intent upon his death! The king still sought to take his life! A shiver ran through his frame as he noticed the ghoulisn leer on the face of his foe, as he crouched on his lounge to leap on his prey in order to redeem the dart that had gone astray. There was no time to be lost. With the agility of a hare David slipped away from the presence of the king and gained the door.

It was the second time that he fled that way! David realized this with great bitterness. There was no tarrying for him anymore now. His death was determined. He could no longer remain at the court of the king. He must flee—he must flee at once! If only he might talk to Jonathan! But the prince was not at home. He had gone out hunting early in the morning. It had been told him that he was not expected to return before the lapse of two or three days, as some big game had been seen in the plain. Quickly he walked home. Every minute counted. He must talk the matter over with Michal. The king could be trusted no longer. He must leave Gibeah at once.

It was growing dark when he reached his house. Michal was amazed when she learned what had happened. She sat down on a couch and sobbed.

“Oh, that Jonathan were here!” she moaned.

Presently she roused herself. With great vehemence she grasped the hand of her mate.

“You must flee!” she urged. “You must flee

without delay. To stay in this place is equal to courting certain death, for the king will not rest till his object be attained." She went to the window and scanned the sky. "It will be a black night," she said. "It is dark already. You must leave at once, before a watch is placed about our house."

A sob checked further speech. David laid his hand about her waist and drew her gently to his breast.

"Be calm, sweet love," he consoled her. "Am I not in the keeping of Jehovah? See, my life has been spared again. Yes, I shall flee—much as I dislike the thought of it. But flee I must, were it only to prevent the king from committing some rash act." He kissed the eyes of the trembling woman. "Now may Jehovah keep you safe in his pavilion," he proceeded. "I go."

"Oh, David, take me along!" Michal exclaimed, clinging to him in wild abandon. "I cannot bear to stay here alone. Ever since we have loved one another, my existence has been but a shadow of your own. Take me along."

David was deeply moved at her grief, but he sadly shook his head.

"It will not do, soul of my soul," he said. "If I knew where to flee, it would be different, but I hardly know whither to turn my steps. You would but encumber my flight. No, let me flee alone, for no one will hurt you. Your life is safe. Moreover, it is possible, that the king will not pursue me at all. Perhaps I shall be able to return before long. So take courage."

Michal controlled her distress.

"Then go," she pressed him. "And may Jehovah be with you!"

By way of the back door, David gained the garden that surrounded the house and disappeared in the thickening darkness. Michal listened in breathless suspense, but all remained still. Then she grew calmer. David was clever. Those who would catch him must rise up early. She could ease her mind on that score.

She stepped to her front window and tried to pierce through the gloom. Here, too, all was silent. "Perhaps," she thought, "the king, as at his first attempt upon the life of David, will desist from further pursuit, as he would have to enlist the help of others." Notwithstanding, strange forebodings troubled her mind. "Suppose some servants of my father's do come here to inquire about David, cannot I find something to put them off for a while, in order to gain time for the fugitive?"

A brilliant thought occurred to her. In most Israelitish households a teraphim, that is to say, an Aramean or Chaldean idol, was found which was supposed to bring fertility. All the zeal of Samuel had not sufficed to destroy those images, which had the size and form of a human being. Also Michal possessed one. She went up to this teraphim, took hold of it, and carried it into David's bedroom. Here she placed it on the couch whereon he slept, covered it up, and arranged about the head a plait of camel's hair. The figure looked indeed like a man. If, now, some messengers should really come to get her husband, and she succeeded to keep them at a distance, she would have little trouble in persuading them that he was sick and thus, perchance,

gain time. Delighted with her stratagem, she left the chamber and went to her own room.

About the hour of midnight a rap resounded upon the door. Michal's heart fluttered with excitement. Another rap! She roused herself. She must not be weak now. She must be strong for David's sake. She rose from the settle on which she had rested and walked to the door.

"Who is there at such an hour?" she asked with as firm a voice as she was able to command.

"It is Paltiel," a man replied. "The king is very ill. The queen has sent me to summon David to play before him."

Michal smiled to herself. As though her mother would send Paltiel on such an errand! She opened the door, but barred the entrance.

"David cannot come," she said, "for he is sick himself."

"Sick himself?" Paltiel repeated, examining the face of the princess.

"Since when?"

"Already this afternoon he felt indisposed. He got worse toward evening, and now he is having a fever."

Paltiel's suspicion was aroused. All evening his men had guarded the house of David. It seemed scarcely probable that he had escaped, and yet, who could tell?

"May I see him?" he queried.

Michal hesitated for just an instant, for she had seen other faces come up behind Paltiel.

"Come in," she said. "But keep these men out, for they will wake him."

Paltiel waved his men back and alone followed the princess, who led the way to David's chamber.

"Step softly," she charged him. "He has just fallen into a slumber and I have covered him up."

Now the bedroom was reached. Michal opened the door.

"Hush!" she said to the officer. "There, remain there. You can see him from there!"

The light of a small candle but dimly dispelled the gloom. Paltiel saw—or at least thought he saw—upon a couch but a rod away, a huddled up figure which he supposed to be David. He was in a quandary. The king, indeed, had charged him to get his son-in-law, but here was an unforeseen difficulty. Was he to carry David to the king on his couch?

Well, there was nothing lost. David was there. He would tell the king what he had found. In the meantime his men could guard the house. It was impossible for his rival to escape. With a low bow to Michal he quitted the room and repaired to his master. The princess, forthwith, bolted the door.

When Michal was alone, she almost collapsed. What if Paltiel had walked up to the couch and examined the effigy? But he had not done it. Her device had succeeded. David had gained time for his flight. As she realized her success, she sobbed for joy.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RUSE IS DISCOVERED

Paltiel had gone to the king in person to tell him of David's illness. He was received quite ungraciously.

"Sick or not sick!" his lord declared. "Bring him hither at once! If he cannot walk, fetch him to me on his bed, that I may slay him!"

When his servant had left the chamber, Saul examined two of his javelins. Their points were sharp as a razor's. A diabolical smile disfigured his features, and a hellish fire gleamed in his eyes.

"Soon I shall be rid of my enemy," he muttered to himself. "From the battles he has come home unscathed, and twice he has dodged my well aimed darts, but now his hour has come. He is sick! Scared to death, ha! Well, it shall be a sickbed from which there is no recovery! Good that Jonathan is away. That simpleton might interfere. He will come too late. When he returns from the chase his friend will long have breathed his last. Yes, I must slay him myself. Paltiel is too slow—fears too much the eye of detection. The sight of David makes me mad. I must have relief—immediate relief or I lose my mind. Come what may, he shall die to-night."

Whilst the king indulged such gruesome thoughts, his servant sped back to David's house. He found his men faithfully guarding the doors.

"Has anything stirred?" he asked.

"No," a soldier returned. "All has remained quiet."

"It is well. Come, my men, it is the king's command that we transport David to the palace on his bed."

He knocked at the door.

"Open!" he demanded.

Michal's face appeared in an upper window.

"What is it now?" she asked indignantly.

"Open!" Paltiel repeated. "David must appear before the king."

"Has my mother the queen charged you thus?"

"No, the king himself commands it."

"But you have seen that David is sick!" the princess flared up. "He cannot walk!"

"No matter," the officer retorted fiercely. "Then we carry him to the king on his bed."

"But that is barbarous! What does the king want with him?"

"I do not know, nor do I care. Open, I say, for the king's command is urgent."

"Cannot you wait until it is day?"

"Open!" Paltiel thundered, losing all patience.

"Open, I say, in the name of the king!"

"Never!" Michal exclaimed defiantly and withdrew from the window.

"Break in the door!" Paltiel charged his men.

The order was promptly executed and a minute later Saul's messengers entered the house. Paltiel led the way to David's bedroom and indicated the couch. The men threw themselves upon it but presently howled in dismay. Instead of David a teraphim lay covered up between the pillows!

Paltiel, for a moment, stood motionless with

fright. His eyes protruded from their sockets. Foam gathered on his lips.

"The woman!" he screeched. "Find the woman!"

Soon Michal's room was discovered.

"Here, lord," the soldiers exclaimed.

Paltiel stood before the bolted door of the princess.

"Open!" he threatened, in a voice thick with fury. No answer from within.

"Open!" his voice rang out once more.

Still no answer.

Then his temper could no longer be controlled. He gave the door a vicious kick, and the panelling flew out. Another, and an opening large enough to admit a man appeared. He entered.

Two candles illumined the chamber. Besides a little table stood Michal in a haughty, defiant attitude.

"Woman," Paltiel snarled, "where is David?"

If he had thought to intimidate the princess, he soon found that he was mistaken. The king's daughter raised herself up and looked down on him as though he were a common menial.

"Get out of this!" she flashed. "This is my private chamber!"

"Where is David?" Paltiel growled.

"That's for you to find out!" Michal retorted disdainfully.

Paltiel trembled like an aspen leaf. His fingers shaped themselves like mighty talons of some bird of prey. It seemed as though he were going to leap on the scornful princess, but he curbed himself by a superhuman effort. He remembered that he had no authority to lay hands on the king's daughter.

Slowly his tension relaxed, he turned, and left the room.

"Guard the door!" he ordered two of his men.

Now the whole house was searched. Paltiel looked everywhere, but all his zeal proved futile. No trace of David was found. It was maddening. What, now, would the king say? He feared to come into his presence and report the exasperating news. Saul was capable of throwing a javelin even at him.

Ah, how exasperating it all was. If he had caught David, he would, this very night, have gotten rid of his rival, and Michal would have been given to his bosom. And now? . . .

He ground his teeth.

"Confound it! Confound it!" he groaned. "There is no telling what the king will do now. But I must make haste. It's not my fault that the bird has flown away. Why did the king command us to wait till the hour of midnight?"

When Saul was informed of David's escape he uttered a ferocious growl.

"My own daughter has aided his flight?" he raved.

"Yes, my lord the king," Paltiel answered with bloodless lips; "she placed in his bed the teraphim and thus imposed upon us."

"Give way," the king cried, bounding from his couch and snatching a dart, "I must see for myself."

In a very short time Saul reached the house of his son-in-law. Panting with the exertion of the run he entered the chamber of Michal, who, when she saw her father's rage, shrank back with fear.

"Wench!" the king cried, lifting the dart to strike her.

"Spare me, father, spare me!" the princess implored.

"Why have you deceived me thus?" the king demanded, grasping her by the shoulders and shaking her pitilessly. "Why have you leagued yourself with my enemy? Why did you let him escape?"

"He threatened to kill me," Michal gasped. "I feared for my life."

The king let her go.

"What?" he cried. "The villain threatened to kill you?"

"Yes," the princess moaned, falling on her knees.

"Ha, the wretch!" the king fumed. "Which way did he take?"

"Through the garden!"

"Up, men," the king commanded, "give chase!"

A minute later the house was forsaken and Michal was alone with her sorrow and joy—sorrow at the recollection of a father's hate; joy at the thought that her husband was safe.

CHAPTER XV.

DISSIMULATION

Meanwhile David sped through wadys and over plains. His mind was in a chaotic state. How fickle his luck had been! Only a few days ago he had been the subject of song and adulation—hundreds had sought to delight and please him; his

position had seemed so secure; in the honor vouchsafed him his family had basked; and now? Like a hunted thing he dashed into the darkness, hardly knowing where to run for refuge and shelter.

Why was it that the king hated him thus? What had he done to excite his wrath? Nothing. His hands were clean. He had served him with a loyalty and devotion that could not be surpassed. He had never shown himself arrogant or presumptuous. He had never claimed privileges that he was not entitled to. Why, therefore, did the king pursue him?

He found no answer to his queries. On he sped—over hills and through valleys. Where should he go? To Bethlehem? To the people that had hailed him as hero and deliverer? No. They might gloat over his misfortune. They would not protect him from the wrath of the king—nor were they able to do so. The more he thought the more he became convinced that there was but one safe place in Israel. That place was Ramah.

David knew that Saul had a superstitious dread of Samuel. He would not dare to assail the house of the prophet. In the company of those who studied the oracles of God he would be secure. Samuel would not only give him shelter, but would also guide him with counsel and advice.

Thus the fugitive hastened on. When morning dawned he had covered half the distance. He rested awhile and slaked his thirst at a spring that murmured in a dale. By noon he reached Ramah. Without delay he entered the abode of the prophet.

Samuel was not a little surprised. He realized

at once that there was something amiss. Extending his arms he gave to the fugitive a cordial welcome.

"What is it, my son?" he said.

David related in order all that had come to pass. The seer listened with paternal concern and attention. Was not David his son, seeing that he had chosen him from all the sons of Jesse?

"Be not dismayed," he said when he knew all. "Jehovah will protect his own. Stay here until the storm be overpast, and strengthen your mind in God."

"But Michal?" the young man asked in great anxiety.

"She, too, is in the keeping of the Lord of hosts."

The prophet's faith and equanimity did not fail to make an impression upon his soul. He trusted that ultimately all would work together for good. In the company of the sons of the prophets who studied the law, he found men who understood the yearnings of his soul. A great peace descended upon him. Quietly one day followed the other. He felt that at the feet of the seer his inner man increased in stature and strength.

As for Saul, he was in a terrible mood. All his servants trembled. His men had scoured the country near and far, but one after another returned without the fugitive. At last, on the evening of the second day after the flight, a spy informed him that David dwelt with Samuel at the Naioth in Ramah. At this intelligence the king had winced.

Samuel! Ha, he might have thought of Samuel at once. What was more reasonable—more natural? At Ramah David was safe. Thither he could not follow his rival, for Samuel was the

prophet of Jehovah. There was not a man in his kingdom who would have assailed the person of the seer. As long as David stayed at the Naioth, he was absolutely beyond his reach. To slay him it was necessary to bring him back to Gibeah. But this could only be brought about by simulating sorrow and grief on account of what had occurred. He must ascribe it to his affliction. Jonathan, in his singleness of heart, would believe it and without a doubt prevail upon his friend to come back. That was the only way.

When on the morning of the next day Jonathan came home from the chase, the king, immediately, summoned him into his presence and confessed to him what he had done.

"Oh, my son," he said, "I knew not what I did. The evil spirit came upon me and tormented me sorely. I am sick at heart. Speak to Michal; speak to the queen; send word to David."

Saul covered his face with his hands and wept. Jonathan, who at first had been wroth, was moved with compassion. The agony of his father gripped at his heart-strings. He left the chamber and repaired to the queen. But no sooner had the door closed behind him, than Saul raised himself up in his pillows and exulted:

"He believes me! He believes me! I get another chance! Ha, give me one more opportunity, and I shall not ask for another!"

Michal was staying with her mother. On the morning that succeeded the dreadful night in which her husband had fled, she had walked to the palace and sought refuge in the arms of the queen.

When Jonathan entered she flew to his throat and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, Jonathan, if you had been here, this had not happened!" she cried. And then the young woman related the story of the flight, omitting nothing. "I am so afraid of this Paltiel," she said. "Now that it is past I know not whence I took the courage to brave him. But father," she sobbed, "oh, oh, how cruelly he handled me. I still feel the clutch of his fingers. Oh, oh!"

The prince drew her gently to him and tried to console her.

"Let us thank Jehovah that David is safe," he said. "Moreover the king repents himself of the deed."

At the last remark Michal withdrew from her brother. Her features became hard, her eyes looked cold.

"I do not believe it," she frowned.

"Yes, my sister, he wept in my presence. He asked me to speak to you and to send word to David. Believe me, it was the evil spirit that goaded him on."

Michal's face remained stern. Slowly she walked to a window and looked over the plain. Too vividly she remembered the details of that dreadful night—the uplifted hand of her father's, his vicious clutch, his terrible words, his burning eyes and ferocious features. A shudder passed over her frame. If it was but the evil spirit that wrought such changes in the king, why was David always selected as the prey? No, her father harbored a deep-seated hate against her husband. That he now appeared to be

sorry was but a pretense. She did not believe that his grief was genuine.

When Jonathan had left the room she turned to the queen.

"Do you share the belief of my brother?" she asked slowly.

The queen's eyes dropped. She sighed.

"Much as I would like to believe it," the princess went on, "I cannot do it. The king's mind is set on the destruction of David. Not until he heard that my husband was at Ramah, did he desist from the pursuit."

"And yet—and yet," the queen endeavored to pacify her ill-treated child, but Michal did not listen. She threw herself on a divan and sobbed aloud.

Drearily one day succeeded another. The king hardly ever quitted his chamber. In Jonathan's presence he was melancholy if not sad. The queen and Michal he overwhelmed with little presents and special attentions. David he never mentioned by name, but he charged Jonathan to see to it that his house be looked after and that every trace of the raid be removed.

The prince believed the king to be truly sorry. After the lapse of two weeks he sent a messenger to David and urged him to return. He tried to persuade his brother-in-law that all danger was over.

"I do not believe," he said to his friend by the mouth of his servant, "that my father harbors a settled purpose to destroy you. It was his malady, surely, it was his malady. You may without fear come back to Gibeah. Tarry no longer, for Michal is pining for you."

Saul learned through his spies that Jonathan was

communicating with David. His heart leaped with malignant glee.

"A little more patience, my soul," he said to himself, "a little more patience, and your enemy's foot is in the trap."

But David was hard to convince. He admired the guilelessness of Jonathan, but could not bring himself to look at things through his eyes. There was a time when he had thought the same way, but he could no more think so today. He was persuaded that the king's mind was made up. To return to Gibeah would be equal to running into the very jaws of death.

Still, when messenger after messenger arrived from Jonathan chiding him for lack of trust, he made up his mind to yield to the pleas of the prince.

"Tell your master," he charged the messenger one day, "to meet me at the stoneEzel, on the day after tomorrow, at the rising of the sun."

When the messenger was gone, David meditated long and deeply. Whom should he believe—himself or his friend? Ah, he longed to see Michal again—to hear her sweet voice, to gaze into her eyes. Would he be safe in the city of the king?

He was loath to wrong his master. Most willingly he would absolve him from guilt. But the evidence! the evidence! He could not believe as he would. He would believe as he must. He considered the evidence, and the voice of reason pronounced against the integrity of the king. Still, he might be mistaken.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RENDEZVOUS

When Jonathan received the message his joy was great. He went at once to his sister and told her that David was coming. Michal, though glad at the prospect of seeing her husband again, could not altogether suppress her fears.

"You mean well," she said, laying her head on Jonathan's breast, "but may you not regret having called him hither. My poor heart is heavy with bodements of evil."

But the prince dissipated her doubts. He pointed out how benign and gentle the king had been of late.

"His contrition is sincere," he declared. "Behold, all his men have been charged to honor David as before. I am sure he awaits his return and would rejoice on account of it, why else has he been sending you gifts and scrupulously repaired the damage wrought to your house? So quiet your fears and hush your misgivings."

At the appointed time Jonathan came to the trysting place which David had chosen. The stone Ezel was a solitary rock which jutted out of an otherwise level plain covered in spots with brushwood and gnarled and stunted pines. It was distant from Gibeah about two miles. Few people ever frequented the place, for tradition pronounced it haunted. In the olden time a man had been murdered near the stone, and it was believed that the soul of that man still hovered over the spot.

When the prince arrived, David stepped forth

from behind a bush. An instant later the friends held each other in warm and affectionate embrace.

"I am very glad that you have come," Jonathan said at length. "Believe me, your life is as safe now as mine. My father the king was plagued by the evil spirit when threw his javelin to strike you."

But David shook his head pensively.

"No, Jonathan," he said, "I cannot believe as you do. The king's mind is made up. He seeks to take my life. He will slay me the moment I am delivered into his power. Now what have I done? What is my iniquity? Wherein have I sinned or come short? In uprightness and truth I have performed all his commands."

"No, no, David," the prince replied ardently, "you err. The king is far from having a fixed purpose to murder you. Far from it: you shall not die: see, my father does nothing great or small without telling me of it. If he meant to kill you, why should he hide this thing from me? It is not so. You err; you most certainly err."

David remained unconvinced.

"Aye, Jonathan," he answered pensively, "would that I could believe as you do, but I cannot. There is a reason why your father has concealed this thing from you. He very well knows that you and I are friends. So he says to himself: 'Jonathan must not know of it until it be accomplished.' Nay, Jonathan, as truly as Jehovah lives, and as truly as your own soul lives, there is but a step between me and death!"

The prince was deeply moved at the pathos of his friend. He regarded him with a disconcerted look and faltered:

"Alas, David, you grieve me—you most surely grieve me, for I think you are wrong and you misjudge the king. But suppose you were right—what can we do? How are we to find out the truth of this matter?"

David reflected a moment, and an idea occurred to him. At the beginning of every month a festive meal was served in the house of Saul, of which every member of the royal family was supposed to partake. Only for very good and cogent reasons was it permissible for anyone to absent himself from the celebrations, which lasted three days. David, as the king's son-in-law, would, of course, be expected to appear at the festive board. A seat would be reserved for him beside Michal the princess. If his place remained empty, Saul would perceive it. Now the way in which he received the absence of his son-in-law would be indicative of his feelings toward him.

"I have a plan," David replied. "Tomorrow is the new moon, and I, as a member of the royal household, should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. If your father miss me at all, then excuse me—say to him that I earnestly besought you for leave to go to Bethlehem, to attend the yearly sacrifice there for all the family. If he accepts your excuse graciously, it is well; I shall know that he seeks not my hurt. But if he is wroth, then know for a certainty that evil is determined against me. Therefore deal kindly with me, for you have brought me into a covenant of Jehovah with yourself: but if there is any iniquity in me I desire not to live. O Jonathan! Here is

my bosom! Slay me yourself if you deem me corrupt. I had rather be pierced by your sword than that of your father's!"

An extreme paleness covered the face of the prince.

"David," he cried in an agony of pain and distress. "David, you lacerate my soul! Far be it from you to speak on this wise. As Jehovah lives, I know you to be true, and if I should at all surmise that evil were resolved by my father to come upon you, I should most certainly tell you of it. Ah, my friend, you have pained me greatly!"

"Forgive me," David pleaded, embracing the prince. "I hardly know what I say, for my heart is so full of grief. Do then as I bid you. Excuse my absence to your father the king."

"Be it as you desire," Jonathan replied. "And may Jehovah grant that you are mistaken!"

"So be it," David agreed. "But," he added questioningly, "in case it chance otherwise—in case your father answers you roughly, who shall tell me of it? You cannot do it yourself, for he may have you watched."

Jonathan pondered.

"I know of a way," he answered thoughtfully. "Hide yourself in the field, and on the morning of the third day come again to this stone Ezel. I shall come hither, accompanied by a lad, and shoot some arrows as though I shot at a mark. The lad who is with me I shall charge to pick them up again. Now let this be the sign: if I say to him: 'The arrows are on this side of the rock;' then come, for there is peace between you and the king. But if I say:

'The arrows are beyond the rock;' then go your way, for the king is planning your hurt."

"The expedient is good," David declared approvingly. "I like it. The possibility of arousing suspicion is very remote."

"Very well, then let it be the sign. I must now go to Gibeah."

"Yes, go back," David urged, "lest any one notice your absence. Give my love to both Michal and the queen. May Jehovah grant that I am wrong and you are right!"

The friends embraced long and ardently and parted from each other.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TRUE FRIEND INDEED

The day of the feast arrived. Every seat with the exception of David's was taken. Saul looked steadily at the vacant place, but he made no remark. A close observer, however, would have noticed that, for a brief second, a menacing cloud gathered on his forehead.

The king had positively expected the young man to be present. Had he not done all in his power to effect a reconciliation? Had he not shown himself contrite? Had he not in a hundred ways endeavored to atone for the deed committed at the urge and hest of the evil spirit? If David kept aloof from the festive board it was equal to a dec-

laration on his part that he believed the king's professions of repentance and good will to be insincere.

But Saul was loath to believe that David would stay away altogether. "Some ceremonial uncleanness prevents him from appearing at the table," he thought to himself. "He will come tomorrow, surely, he will come tomorrow." So the king controlled his chagrin. He was agreeable all the day long. Jonathan perceived it and rejoiced. It was a good omen. His friend was safe.

On the second day of the feast things were established in their usual order, and still David was not present. The king saw it and his face darkened. It could not be ceremonial uncleanness then that kept his son-in-law away, for that excuse could only avail for one day. It must be something else—it must be distrust or contempt or both!

"Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday nor today?" he demanded in a loud voice, which made all present start.

The guests looked at one another uneasily and in silence and ultimately fixed their eyes as by agreement upon Jonathan, who colored slightly. Also the king's eye rested on the prince—loweringly, threateningly, but Jonathan did not wince.

"David," he answered calmly, "earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem before returning to the court. His family have a sacrifice there today, and his brethren desired him to be present. As he beseeched me so, I gave him permission to go. Therefore he is not at the king's table."

At this announcement Saul turned livid with pent-up rage. He fairly gasped for words. Rising to his feet, and staring at his son with eyes that rolled

frightfully in their sockets, he finally gave vent to language that would have disgraced forever the lips of even his lowest menial.

"Thou son of a perverse, rebellious woman," he bellowed with a voice of thunder, "do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame, and to the confusion and dishonor of thine own mother? I disown you. I cast you off. Can he be my legitimate son who loves whom I hate? Can he be my rightful issue who supports the villain whose object is the destruction of my family? Mark it, you renegade, as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Wherefore I command you to send this minute to fetch him to me, for he shall surely die!"

For a moment the prince felt himself paralyzed at the cruel language his father used. He gazed at him as though he were a fiend of hell. Presently he gave a start. He had heard his mother sob—he had heard Michal utter a low moan. Springing to his feet he replied, with quivering lips, to his father across the board:

"Wherefore should David be put to death? What has he done?"

A ghoulish laughter greeted his questions. Saul was beside himself with fury.

"Simpleton," he cried. "Nay, dissembler and traitor, you are even like unto him! There, let that teach you, if my words you are unwilling to heed!" and, saying so, the raving monarch cast his javelin, which he never went without, at his own son. The women shrieked and some of the men raised their hands as it were in protest. Fortunately Jonathan,

by a quick movement, avoided the dart, which flew past his shoulder and crashed against a column of porphyry. Pale as death, but unscathed, he stood in his place. An indescribable sadness covered his noble countenance. Raising himself to his full splendid height he answered, in a voice surcharged with pain:

"My father, you have this day dishonored not only yourself, but my mother and me. I can no more stay at this table. Behold, I leave it with the fire of shame on my cheeks (and as he said it, the blood rushed back into the face that had been white as a sheet). I am ashamed, not because of David, who is a true and upright man—the best man in all the nation; I am ashamed, not of my mother, who has never been false, but I am ashamed of the king my father!"

Slowly the prince left the festive board. He was joined by the queen and David's betrothed.

All day long the prince remained in a kind of stupor. His own father had cast a spear at him! Was it at all possible? Was he at all awake, or was he dreaming? No, he was not dreaming, he was fully awake. Then it was also true what he had been so loath to believe, that his father harbored an implacable enmity at David, and would certainly kill him if he found him.

Ah, how his father had changed! Jonathan thought of the years gone by. There was a time when he had been the right hand of the king. If something of importance was to be done his counsel had always been sought. Those had been joyful days—days of happiness and bliss. But gradually everything had changed. The king had become

a tyrant. He had assumed airs. His face, once so honest and frank, had become a mask. It no more radiated contentment and inner repose, but rather betrayed sullen suspicion, anxiety, and fear. Paltiel, in time, had become the confidant of the king, whilst he, the son, had been relegated to a secondary position. Today the estrangement had become complete.

Jonathan groaned. Aimlessly he wandered through glens and dales, floating, as it were, between a delirium and a dream. Body and soul were fevered. He felt like weeping, but his eyes remained hot and dry.

Toward evening he returned home. When the noise of the feast reached his ear, trembling seized him. The mirth of the evening banquet seemed to him as the malign revel of some demoniac orgy. He noticed that the merriment became more and more boisterous. It appeared as though the feast were turned into a veritable bacchanalian rout. Had his father no conscience anymore? did he seek forgetfulness in wanton debauch?

Jonathan's veins throbbed in every pulse, his own touch seemed to him like fire. He felt sick—sick at heart. Slowly he took his way to the queen's chamber. All night he stayed with his insulted mother and dispirited sister and tried to console and to comfort them, though his own strength and fortitude were taxed to the breaking point. When morning dawned he called a lad to his side, gave him his weapons, and went into the field again to give to David the preconcerted signal.

The dew was still upon the ground. Birds were

singing everywhere. Nature was redolent with peace and gladness. The contrast was oppressive.

Close to the place where his friend was hiding the prince stood still and took from the boy his bow and three arrows.

"Run now," he charged him, "and find the arrows which I shoot!"

The boy ran forward, to do as he was commanded, but, after a few paces, stumbled over a rock. This prevented him from noting where the arrows descended which his master had shot into the air. As he recovered from his fall and looked about, Jonathan shouted:

"They have fallen far beyond the stone Ezel. Make haste—do not tarry."

The lad ran into the indicated direction and soon returned with the arrows.

"That will do," said his master. "I do not feel like shooting anymore. Take my weapons into the city. I shall linger yet a while."

Having said so, he reclined on the grass beside the stone and watched his page go home.

When the lad had disappeared in the distance, he heard a rustling noise quite close to his side, and, an instant later, David stood before him.

Jonathan rose and embraced his friend, who looked pale and wistful.

"You were right," he said at length. "The king's mind is made up." And then he told what had happened at the feast.

David's paleness increased. Although he had not looked forward to a favorable report, what he heard exceeded his worst apprehensions. He was perfectly shocked. At the same time his heart welled

over with love and esteem for him who had proved so true in the hour of need. What virtue! What rectitude! What goodness and faithfulness! Failing of words to express his emotion, he bowed himself with his face to the earth, as was the custom of a subject to his king. But the prince interfered.

"Rise up," he said kindly. "Bow not to me. We are friends."

"Yes, a true friend you are," David answered. "In all the world there is not your equal. But, tell me, have you divined why the king hates me so?"

A troubled expression came into Jonathan's eyes.

"I have," he replied slowly. "The king has learned through his spies of your anointing at the hands of Samuel."

"Well, what of it?" David queried surprised.

"He believes that the anointing signifies that Jehovah has chosen you to despoil him of the throne."

"Jonathan!" David exclaimed overwhelmed with the announcement.

"Yes, it is even so," the prince resumed. "He fears that as long as you live his kingdom is insecure. He believes that you are the man concerning whom the prophet spoke on Gilgal's height when he declared: 'Jehovah hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou!' For this reason he hates and pursues and seeks to slay you."

"But that is madness!" David cried. "It is madness!"

But Jonathan shook his head.

"Nay, David," he replied, "why should it be madness? My father has been rejected. Our whole house has been rejected. Someone else is to reign

over Israel. On your head has been poured the sacred oil—on your head of all men: for where has a layman ever been anointed before? Why should it be so incredible a thing that Jehovah has chosen you? The more I think of it the more fully persuaded I become myself that to you will be given the throne.”

All this was so sudden—all flashed so rapidly upon the consciousness of David, that it overwhelmed him.

“It cannot be!” he faltered. “It cannot be. The prophet would surely have told me.”

“No, David, there you err. Samuel knew what he did when he told you to wait. If you had known the whole truth from the beginning, it would have hampered your movements, it would have weighed on your mind and rendered you uneasy in our presence. As it was, you dwelt among us in perfect tranquility and would have continued to do so if it had not been for the hate of the king.”

“Oh, Jonathan,” David answered, “speak no more about it, I cannot believe it.”

The prince took the young man in his arm and kissed his forehead.

“Calm yourself,” he said. “No matter what the future may bring, I am and remain your friend. If the anointing stands for what I now believe it to signify, Jehovah’s will be done! It is not for me to strive against it, nor is it for you to shrink away from it. It is for both of us humbly to accept it.”

“Oh, Jonathan,” David exclaimed, throwing his arms about the neck of the prince, “how noble you are—how true! I am your debtor to the end of

my life. Never, never shall I be able to repay your love!"

"Who knows?" the prince said gravely. "The future no one can pierce. You are a fugitive and a wanderer now—who knows but that after a year or so I and my father's house may be in your place!"

"Heaven forfend!" David cried.

"Yes, yes," the prince continued pensively, "I feel it coming. I know that before long the crown will be yours. Then remember the oaths we have sworn to each other—remember that I dealt kindly with you, remember, and deal kindly also with my kindred and me!"

"As Jehovah lives, I shall never forget the pledges given and taken," David declared, whilst the tears streamed forth from his eyes. "May my name be cast out as vile by all the children of men if I fail or come short of my vow."

"It is well," Jehovah replied. "Now go in peace. Be not concerned for Michal, I shall shield her from harm with my own life. Stay neither in Ramah nor in Bethlehem—go to some other place; for the king will certainly seek you there. The Lord preserve your going in and your coming out!"

One more embrace, and the friends parted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE TABERNACLE

All day long David continued to hide himself. He was an outlaw now. It would not do for him to journey in bright daylight. He must wait for the night. As the day wore away he became conscious of an ever-increasing hunger. His provisions had all been consumed. Early in the morning he had eaten his last crumb of bread.

When it began to grow dark he quitted his hiding place and walked toward Nob, a little city seven miles away from Gibeah. In this city was the Tabernacle of Jehovah. An old priest by name of Ahimelech presided over the sanctuary. He was the great grandson of Eli, the priest under whom Samuel had entered the temple service when a child. All his descendants lived in Nob, which, on that account, was called the "priestly" city. Once or twice David had frequented the place on business for Saul. We remember also that in the care of this Ahimelech the king had left the sword which David had wrested from the giant at Gath. To this priest the fugitive would go. He hoped that from him he would obtain both food and a weapon.

After much reflection he had resolved to leave the land of Israel altogether. From Nob he would go over to the Philistines. Gath, their principal city, was not far distant. It involved some risk to go there, but the danger was not greater than that

which lurked for him in his own country. It had come to his knowledge that Goliath, whom he had killed, and Dagon, whom he had captured, had been outspoken rivals of Achish, the king of the Philistines. It was possible, therefore, that Achish would deal kindly with him. There was reason to believe that the Philistine monarch would grant him a safe place of refuge.

Early next morning David entered the Tabernacle of God. He appeared weary and faint. He was unarmed and unkempt. The old priest, who recognized him immediately, gazed at him surprised, if not alarmed. He knew of David's flight from the court and his sojourn at Ramah. He also had heard that the king had repented himself of the evil done to his son-in-law and that things were established as before, but when he saw the young man so travel-stained in garb, and of mien so disordered, he secretly feared that some new difference had arisen between them, and that David was flying for his life.

"What is it, my son?" he asked with uncertain voice.

David perceived that Ahimelech was suspicious. To succeed he must employ prudence.

"The king has sent me on a pressing business," he answered promptly. "Great secrecy is required. Three men, my companions, are concealing themselves before the gate of the city. They are all as famished and weary as myself, for we took no provisions along. Give me, therefore, I pray you, what is under your hand. Give me some five loaves of bread, or whatever you have."

The priest looked disconcerted.

"There is no common bread under my hand," he said hesitatingly. "I have only holy bread left."

The holy bread, or showbread, consisted of twelve loaves of unleavened bread, each one made of one-fifth of an ephah of fine flour. They were laid upon a table in the Holy Place, one upon another, in two columns, and allowed to remain there for two weeks, at the end of which period they were removed and eaten by the priests upon holy ground, that is, within the princincts of the Tabernacle. For other persons than priests to eat of the loaves of the showbread was accounted sacrilege. David knew this, and his eye quailed. He had hoped that the priest might have other provisions about him. Ahimelech saw his disappointment and added, undecidedly:

"I might, for once, make an exception—I might give you the showbread if I knew for a certainty that neither you nor your men are legally defiled."

David's face brightened.

"Set your mind at ease as to that," he assured the priest. "Neither I nor my men have contracted defilement for the last three days. Moreover," he went on artfully, "consider that our commission is of extreme importance and requires haste. To withhold sustenance from us might work great harm to the nation."

"You are right," Ahimelech agreed, and, without further objections, he bade Abiathar his son to fetch five loaves of the holy bread and to give them to David.

In the meantime the fugitive asked the priest for a weapon.

"I broke my sword on the way," he said. "Have

you under your hands one that I might use—or if no sword, then a spear?”

Ahimelech reflected.

“Yes,” he answered, “there is with me the sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you slew in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will, take that, for there is no other than that here.”

“Give it me,” David cried delightedly; “there is none like that!”

Ahimelech himself fetched the sword of Goliath. A little later Abiathar brought the holy loaves. David took the weapon and the food, thanked the priest in the name of the king, and hurried away.

But he was not to come off that easily. As he passed through the court of the Tabernacle he encountered Doeg, the keeper of Saul’s herds. The man started, gazed at him for an instant, saluted mechanically, and thereupon entered the sanctuary.

David’s knees smote together.

“Why is Doeg here?” he asked himself. “Am I betrayed already? Has Saul sent him?”

Quickening his steps he hastened on, now and then casting a furtive glance behind himself to see whether anybody followed him. Not until he had placed a couple of miles between himself and the city of Nob did he stop to eat a morsel of bread. When he was satisfied that no one pursued him, he concluded at last that Doeg had come in by chance and was still ignorant of what had occurred at the court.

And so it was. The chief of Saul’s herdsmen had arrived in Nob about four days ago with bullocks and lambs for the altar. As he was a

“proselyte of justice” to the Hebrew faith, he remained for a week at the Tabernacle to fulfil a vow. Thus he had no knowledge of the flight of David and heard nothing of the disturbance at the feast. Still, when he noticed the alarm of the king’s son-in-law, he calculated that there was something amiss.

“Holy bread!” he muttered to himself. “And the sword of Goliath! That looks suspicious! I wonder what his intentions are? He did not like it that I crossed his way. He was embarrassed. Well, I am glad I met him. Perhaps the discovery is worth something. I am curious whether he is really reconciled to the king? Paltiel has been somewhat reserved of late. The trouble is no one seems able to fathom Saul.”

CHAPTER XIX.

AT GATH

When David had satisfied his hunger he resumed his flight. He felt ill at ease. It was no light thing to venture amongst the Philistines. True, the king himself might be friendly disposed to him, but if his nobles and mighty men showed themselves hostile, it was doubtful whether his influence would prevail.

David feared also for Ahimelech. Doeg the Edomite was a dangerous man. It was almost certain that he would get the aged priest into

trouble. If he told Saul what he had observed—that Ahimelech had provided his enemy with food and arms—the priest's life would certainly be endangered. It was no small thing to lay hands on a man of God, but would the king care? He who could cast a javelin at his own son, would he have any qualms slaying a priest?

And David thought also of his father's house in Bethlehem. Would his family be safe? What if Saul wreaked his vengeance upon them? What if he confined them in prison and held them as hostages, and threatened them with loss of life if he, the fugitive, did not return?

David had arrived at a point where he believed Saul to be capable of the most atrocious crime.

"If Achish gives me shelter," he said to himself, "I shall ask him to protect also my parents and brethren. Alas, alas," he moaned, "how everything has changed. How happy and proud my father and my mother were at the wedding in Gibeah, and now they must experience such grief. Alas, alas!"

Toward evening he reached a little woods in the neighborhood of Gath. Here he decided to spend the night. He was completely exhausted, but for hours and hours he found no sleep.

"The anointed of Jehovah!" he soliloquized again and again. "The future king of Israel seeking refuge amongst the uncircumcised! Can there be greater mockery?"

When the sun had risen and the day waxed warm he awoke from a troubled sleep into which he had ultimately fallen. A spring gurgled near his bed of leaves. He soaked his bread in it and satisfied

his hunger. Thereupon he boldly approached the gates of Gath.

When he was yet a half a mile from the city a band of Philistines surrounded him. David threw away his weapon and raised his hands aloft.

"Do not shoot!" he cried, when he saw their menacing attitude. "I have come to see your king."

The chief of the band approached and surveyed David curiously.

"By the altar of Dagon," he exclaimed, "is not this the champion of the Hebrews? Be quick, my men! Take hold of him! Let him not escape! Well do I remember his face, for was I not the armor-bearer of Goliath whom he slew in the valley of Elah!"

A few minutes later David found himself securely bound with hempen ropes. He protested in vain. The Philistines disregarded his complaints. In great haste he was conducted to the city.

Here the news of the capture of the warrior chief of the Israelites was bruited about with incredible quickness. Men, women, and children crowded the streets. David saw their eyes gleaming with delight and revenge. An ominous muttering was audible. Now and again voices were heard that clamored for his instant death. David began to tremble for his life.

A group of noblemen appeared. They regarded him with sinister frowns. When they had listened to the report of the leader of the band, a very haughty looking Philistine asked sneeringly:

"So you wish to see the king?"

"Yes."

"What is your business?"

"That I shall tell the king alone."

"Oho, oho!" the nobleman mocked.

"Conduct me to the king!" David insisted. "I have an important message for him."

"Do as he says," the nobleman, half hesitatingly, commanded the chief of the band, and, a little later, David stood before Achish.

The ruler of the Philistines was greatly astonished when he learned of the identity of the prisoner. He even appeared to be delighted. David perceived it and took heart again. Ingenuously he replied to Achish's question why he had come:

"The king, no doubt, has heard that for some time there has been strife between Saul and myself. Now conditions of late have come to such a pass that I fled from my master. I have come to Gath to offer to you my person and my sword."

Achish took council with himself, and, after a while, answered:

"Your offer pleases me well, but it is not for me alone to decide this matter. What is your opinion, my lords?"

The Philistine nobles greeted their king with glum looks. Murmurings of disapproval arose here and there. Finally one stood forth and said:

"Let the king consider well what he does! I do not believe that the offer is made in good faith. It is a trap! We must not forget that our prisoner is the darling of Israel. We must not forget the loss his sword has wrought to our nation—not once, not twice, but a score of times. Of him the women of Israel sang to one another in their dances, saying, 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands!' I am against receiving him as a

friend; I rather recommend that we avenge our many dead."

A murmur of applause went up at this speech.

"Yes," a second nobleman demanded, "strike off his head and send his headless trunk as a present to the Hebrews!"

Achish strove in vain to pacify his nobles. They grew more vociferous every minute. There was danger that they might kill David in his very presence. He saw that they would never accept the slayer of Goliath as their companion in arms. But he wished to save the youth who had ridded him of two powerful rivals. So he rose from his throne and lifted high his sceptre, at which dread sign immediate silence ensued.

"We cannot decide this matter today," he said, "for many of my nobles are absent. Tomorrow we shall judge of the offer of the prisoner."

David was now escorted into a chamber, whose only window was closed up with strong iron bars. The door was bolted behind him and guarded by six soldiers. He felt that escape was impossible from here, and his spirit forsook him.

"If the lords of the Philistines find me here tomorrow, I am lost," he said to himself. "I *must* get away from here—I *must*!"

He examined the rods that secured his window. Alas, they were thick and closely fitted together. It was impossible to break them away. He listened at the door. Here, too, no hope of escape, for his ear caught the low-spoken words of the soldiers who watched him.

"Fool that I was," he groaned, "to have ventured into the land of the Philistines. Now I shall die

like a dog at their hands! Oh, Jonathan, if you saw me now, would you still think me the chosen of Jehovah?"

Toward evening the door opened and Achish entered. David's spirit revived again for he read good will and concern in his face. The king closed the door behind himself and pondered, sympathetically, the dejected face of the captive, who had risen from his seat and now did obeisance.

"I have come to save you," he whispered softly, "for you are dear to me and have rendered me a service. But you will have noticed that my lords will yield to neither pleas nor reason. Force I cannot employ, for the people are on their side. If you fall into their hands tomorrow, you will die a horrible death. Already preparations are being made to torture you as never an enemy was tortured before. It is only a ruse, therefore, that can save you from destruction."

The king stopped a moment, surveyed the questioning eyes of his captive, and then proceeded:

"You know that our nation never harms or afflicts a madman. Madness is by us considered as a kind of spiritual possession. To violate a person who has lost his reason is a grievous offense against the gods. Now I would suggest to you to feign yourself mad. The only thing that makes me anxious is whether you will be able to simulate madness in such a way that it appears to be real."

David's eyes lit up with new hope. Whether he could pose as a madman to save his life? Indeed he could! He bowed himself with his face to the floor and said, with emotion:

"Jehovah be praised, who has sent me a deliverer

in the hour of need! I knew it, O king, that you thought of my rescue. Now, therefore, let not your mind be disquieted. If madness can save me I shall pretend to be mad, and no one shall notice."

"It is well," the king replied and left the chamber.

In the night that followed David became very unruly. The soldiers that guarded the door charged him repeatedly to be quiet, but their commands were ignored. The prisoner stamped to and fro in his chamber and uttered incoherent words. When, at last, the officer of the watch removed the bolt and opened the door he found a raving maniac. Almost scared out of his wits he withdrew and gazed, with blanched face, at his comrades.

"He is mad!" he said. "What, now, will the lords do?"

The prisoner's fury increased every hour. Now he would shout—now he would cry—now he would screech, and scream, and howl. The soldiers heard how the furniture was broken in pieces, but they dared not enter the chamber to interfere.

"Oh, that it were morning!" they moaned in superstitious dread, moving away from the door as far as their duty allowed.

As the morning began to dawn and people moved to and fro, they freely published the vexing discovery. The story passed from mouth to mouth, and, when at last the nobles assembled to give their final judgment, the whole city buzzed with the news that the Hebrew captive had lost his reason.

Also the lords of the Philistines had heard the rumor. Excitedly they asked one another whether the report were true. They scrutinized the king who just now sat down on his throne and opened

the meeting. But Achish was calm. He seemed unaware of what set his subjects agog. So perhaps it was but a false alarm.

The king called the meeting to order and commanded the prisoner to be brought in. The officer of the watch appeared promptly, but he did not bring David. The man's face was pale with agitation. He made a profound bow and stammered an apology for coming alone.

"The Hebrew champion is delirious with frenzy," he said. "All night he has been howling and shouting. My men are afraid to go into his room. May it please the king to command what is to be done."

Achish appeared astounded. His brilliant eye swept the magnificent assembly before him as though he desired to learn more from them. Only perplexity bordering on terror greeted him.

"You mean to say that the man is mad?" he demanded of the officer.

"You have said it," replied the man, bowing low.

The king rose erect in his chair.

"Let us go and see the prisoner!" he commanded, and stepped down from the dais, to lead the way. His ministers and army chiefs followed. Before the chamber in which David was confined they halted and listened. Weird, unearthly cries and groans, interspersed with fragments of hymns, sung in a funereal way, penetrated through the door. The lords of the Philistines looked at each other, doubtful and appalled.

"Open!" the king commanded curtly.

The bolt flew back, the door opened, and a dismal sight disclosed itself to view. The prisoner squatted on the floor and frantically rocked himself to

and fro; his hair was dishevelled; his eyes rolled wildly in their sockets, and foam from his mouth flowed freely upon his chin and fell on the floor.

He seemed to become conscious of the spectators. Blinking with his eyes, he rose to his knees and cautiously moved toward the open door. Presently he laughed aloud and wrote fiercely with his finger in the air. The Philistine nobles withdrew in terror, some extending their hands as if to ward off a spell. The maniac laughed again, ogled the spectators viciously and crouched as if ready to leap on some prey. Then the voice of the king rang forth:

"He is mad! Without a doubt he is mad!" he cried. "Wherefore have you brought him before me? Do I lack madmen in my kingdom? Did you consider it sport for me to look on his antics? Take him away! Lead him out of this house! Conduct him without the gates of my city!"

Saying this, the king hastened away, being followed by his lords. The soldiers, however, promptly carried out the behest that was given them. David was treated with every sign of respect and awe. Strong hands lifted him into a sedan which immediately set itself in motion, and, after the lapse of but a short time, he found himself before the gates of Gath. No sooner had he been taken out of his portable chair, than his escort returned to the city. The fugitive was alone, and safe. He could hardly control his joy. Still simulating insanity he reeled and staggered on his way. He kept up his mimics until the trees of the wood that grew nearby concealed him from the eyes of his foes.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN OF A BAND

When David realized that he was free once more, his first thoughts were thoughts of praise and thanksgiving. He kneeled on the ground and exclaimed:

"I will bless Jehovah at all times:
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make her boast in Jehovah:
The meek shall hear thereof and be glad.
I sought Jehovah, and he answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
This poor man cried, and Jehovah heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles.
Jehovah is nigh unto them that are of a broken
heart,
And saveth such as are of a contrite spirit.
He redeemeth the soul of his servants,
And none of them that take refuge in him shall be
condemned."

After having thus rendered praise to God David revolved whither he should now turn his steps.

About ten miles from Gath ran the valley of Elah, the scene of his great encounter with Goliath. Thither he sped. He knew the low hills south of the valley to be literally burrowed with caves, some of them of very large dimensions. One of these caves he would select as a hiding place. From here

he would be able to communicate with his family, since the valley was only a few hours journey from Bethlehem.

When the fugitive reached the valley of Elah, he examined with care a number of its natural caves. One after another he rejected. At last he came to a veritable subterranean palace, with vast columnar halls and arched chambers. It was spacious enough to afford a splendid retreat for even a mighty host.

"I shall go at once to Bethlehem," he said to himself, "and ask my family to join me. Saul will surely seek me, and, if he fails to find me, transmit his fury to them. I must make haste, for tomorrow already it may be too late."

He thought of Michal, and a tear stole into his eye. Ah, how he loved her! Now that he had been torn away from her he realized more than ever before how intimately her life was part of his. His wife had been reft from his heart, his existence, at the very moment when he thought himself most secure in her possession.

"Oh, Jehovah, keep her safe from harm!" his lips murmured, as he strode toward Bethlehem.

Late in the evening he knocked at his father's door. When his family saw him they were terrified, for on the afternoon of that selfsame day a messenger had come to them from Jonathan, informing them of what had occurred. The prince advised the house of Jesse to flee—to flee without delay, as it was evident that the king had also resolved to destroy them. Great confusion, therefore, ensued when David so suddenly appeared on the scene.

"My God," his mother cried alarmed, "are they after you? Are they coming?"

"Tell us! Tell us!" his brothers ejaculated.

"You know already?" David asked.

"Yes, Jonathan has sent us word."

They showed him the letter. David read it and turned pale.

"Exactly what I feared," he said. He looked at Jesse who trembled violently. "Oh, father, that I must bring such misfortune upon our house!"

He staggered. Eliab, his eldest brother, caught him in his arms. When he regained control of his limbs he begged:

"Give me victuals. I am faint with hunger."

They gave him milk, bread and cheese. He ate, and, after he had strengthened himself, told them in order all that had taken place.

"You must all come with me," he declared. "To remain in Bethlehem would be equal to courting certain death. The cave I have found is large enough to shelter a multitude."

"Yes, let us flee," Eliab counseled. "Let us go with David, I know of no better retreat."

Preparations for the flight, induced by Jonathan's letter, which had already been under way, though in a haphazard fashion, were now resumed with greater deliberation. Great quantities of provisions were collected. Asses and carts were provided, and, before the morning dawned, the whole house of Jesse was on the way to David's hiding place. The common adversity had curbed, if not effaced, the jealousy that had heretofore poisoned the hearts of at least two of his brethren—Eliab and Abinadab.

Early in the forenoon the caravan—for such it was—reached the valley of Elah. All found room

in the ample cave which David directed them to. Astonished they looked about.

"If Saul does not discover us here," Eliab declared, "we shall be able to manage for a season."

The younger members of the family quickly adapted themselves to the circumstances. They found the new mode of life extremely romantic. But not so the aged parents. Though they did not complain, David well perceived how keenly they suffered.

It was a good thing, however, that the house of Jesse had fled without delay. On the next afternoon it would have been too late. A band of henchmen arrived in Gibeah with strict orders from Saul to place under arrest all the family of David. To their chagrin they found but empty dwelling places. When they asked the denizens of the village as to Jesse's whereabouts, they either could not or would not give any definite information. The soldiers scolded and threatened, but the Bethlehemites only scowled and frowned. As in other places, so also here, Saul was rapidly losing the affection of the people, which, at the beginning of his reign, he had possessed in so rich a measure. His many extravagances and wild excesses begot in the breasts of his subjects an ever increasing resentment. Foiled and enraged the soldiers returned to their master.

Now, the departure of the house of Jesse had been observed by not a few Bethlehemites. The unusual noise had roused them from their slumber and kept them awake. A shepherd lad had even followed them a goodly distance and seen them wend their way in the direction of the valley of

Elah. The angry search of the messengers of Saul, as well as the story they told of their master's wrath, was explanation enough why Jesse, their beloved elder, had fled. All sympathized with his misfortune. Many feared for their own hearth and lives. Would the king stop at the house of Jesse? Might it not be possible that his next move would be to punish the whole town? Here David had first been honored—here he had passed his youth. From here his family had escaped unscathed. Surely, nothing was more natural than that failing to get David, Saul would vent his ire on the people he regarded his friends. He had cast his javelin at the crown prince; he certainly would not pause to ravage their town.

"Up, let us follow the house of Jesse!" many denizens, therefore, said, and a large company called and followed the fugitive.

The example of the Bethlehemitel was contagious. Every where groups of men gathered together and hastened to the valley of Elah. Soon David saw himself surrounded by an ever increasing mixed and motley company, who, unanimously, chose him as their captain and leader. They were all men who had suffered more or less from the tyranny of Saul. They represented the personal and political labors of the age in which they lived. The kingdom had declined under the administration of Saul, and, everything being out of course and compass, the people, who under healthy circumstances would have been socially foremost, were thrown into poverty and driven into gloom and despair. They were only too thankful to constitute themselves into a band under able leadership, and David, they

thought, was in all respects preeminently the man to guide and inspire a host which had been demoralized and dispirited.

Many of the men who joined themselves to David, were in open rebellion to Saul. They urged him to retaliate, as for instance, Ahimelech the Hittite, and Abishai the son of Hernish, both captains of five hundred who had deserted the king. But David shook his head. Saul, to him, was the anointed of Jehovah who dared not be touched. No, no, he would use his force not against Saul, but rather against Israel's enemies. He counted his men and discovered that about six hundred had joined themselves to him. Properly trained that was a host with which some mighty deeds could be done. He would, on his own responsibility, take up the work which the king neglected to do.

But where was he to bestow his father and mother? He could not very well carry them from place to place and expose them to the vicissitudes, to the successes and reverses, of a military life, not to mention the fact that they would greatly impede the movements of his followers, whose safety he must secure.

After mature reflection David decided to leave his present hiding place. His band was getting too large for the caves of the valley of Elah. He thought it best to pass to the other side of the Jordan, and to enter the territory of the Moabites for a season.

The Moabites, at this time, were occupying the southern part of the trans-Jordanic country which belonged to Israel. This was within easy reach of Bethlehem. David crossed the Jordan and en-

trenched himself on a mountain height known as Mizpah Moab, that is to say, the "outlook" or "watchtower".

The outlaw captain was not without kindred in Moab, as has already been pointed out. His father, as the grandson of the famous Ruth the Moabitess, was well known in the land. Accordingly, David felt confident enough to send an embassy to the king of Moab, and to ask shelter and protection for his aged parents. His messengers were cordially received, and the king himself came out to the stronghold where David was camping, urging him to accept hospitality also for himself and his host. But David, remembering that the Moabites were idolaters, suavely declined the generous offer.

"Nay," he said, "let, I pray you, my father and my mother dwell with you. As for me, let me stay here until I know what God will do for me."

The guidance for which David waited was soon vouchsafed him. A messenger arrived from Samuel, charging him, to leave at once the land of Moab, as his stay was not in accordance with the purpose of God. Consequently he recrossed the Jordan, and sought shelter in the forest of Hareth, within the boundaries of Judah.

But meanwhile Saul had learned from his spies what was already the common report of the land, namely, that David was showing himself publicly, and enlisting men into his service. At this news the king raved furiously. He laid aside the thoughts of all other business and forthwith devoted himself wholly to the pursuit of the bold conspirator.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GHASTLY EXECUTION

A royal court is held in Gibeah. Under a mighty tamarisk tree the king sits on his chair of state. In his hand is a spear. With moody, gloomy eyes he regards the officers that compose his council. A close inspection reveals the singular fact that they are all Benjamites, that is to say, of his own tribe. Saul had expelled from his presence the men of every other tribe. He thought them all traitors. He no longer trusted any but his own clansmen. And even these he now accused of having conspired against him.

"Hear now, ye Benjamites," he finished a caustic harangue, "will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all captains of hundreds and captains of thousands, that all of you have plotted against me! Why is it that you are all in league with my foe? Know you not that his only object is to deprive me of the throne? But you are all confederate with him! You know very well that this traitor has made a covenant with my son Jonathan, but there is none of you who is sorry for me, or discloses to me where David is hiding himself."

The officers were mortified. As a matter of fact, they knew no more than the king himself. If they had known of David's camp, they would most certainly have informed against him, for they were one and all the slaves of covetousness. Saul's

appeal to their cupidity was forceful enough. They knew from experience that their master rewarded quite bountifully those who faithfully served him.

Amongst the courtiers who stood before Saul was Doeg the Edomite. This man saw his opportunity now. He hated Ahimelech. He hated the whole priesthood. If he now told what he had seen he would both defend the courtiers from guilty knowledge of a plot to dethrone the king, and, at the same time, strike a deadly blow at the priests of God. He stood forth.

"My lord," he said, "I could relate an important observation."

Saul looked up. He liked the dark-visaged Edomite.

"Say on!" he commanded.

"My lord suspects the wrong men of conspiracy," the chief of the herdsman began. "There is a conspiracy, it is true, a most foul conspiracy; but it is not nurtured by the servants of the king: rather it has been hatched out and is being fostered by the priests and the prophets."

Saul gave a start. The suggestion appealed to his mind. But the evidence—could evidence be adduced to prove the charge? Dire distress upon the culprits if it could be demonstrated that they were guilty! He would spare neither man nor woman, neither old man nor child.

"Proceed!" he urged the Edomite, "proceed!"

Doeg's eyes glittered ominously.

"A month ago I was detained before the Lord at Nob," he went on. "A vow kept me in the Tabernacle of God. Now, one day, as I entered the sanctuary, I surprised David conversing with the

high-priest. Ahimelech appeared very much concerned for him, for he gave him victuals, the sword of Goliath, and even inquired the will of Jehovah by Urim and Thummim. When I first returned, my lord the king was hotly pursuing his foe. For this reason I did not speak immediately. I thought: let David be captured first, and then let the priests be punished. But now that David has safely concealed himself I deem it my duty to warn the king of the treachery of Ahimelech the high-priest."

The king, for awhile, was mute with rage and amazement. It was preeminently the last charge that roused his ire, for the privilege of consulting the Urim and Thummin—an instrument consisting of twelve precious stones by means of which the will of Jehovah was ascertained—was confined to the chief ruler of the nation. If David had claimed that privilege, and Ahimelech had vouchsafed it to him, both were guilty of treason.

"Up," Saul cried, regaining speech, "up; let us march upon Nob and punish the priests of God!"

An army of five hundred men was quickly collected and the king led the way to the priestly city. The sanctuary was completely surrounded and Ahimelech ordered to summon all his family to appear on the instant to give account of certain matters.

With a heavy heart Ahimelech, who surmised the reason, called together all his family and all the priests, and led them in long procession forth to the impatient and angry king's pavilion. As they stood there, clad in their sacred vestments, and the high-priest himself arrayed in his miter, ephod, pectoral and breastplate, and wearing his purple robe,

the company of eighty-five priests—for that was their number—could not but inspire awe in the court of the king. Only Saul himself was destitute of reverence. With raucous voice he cried:

“Hear now, thou son of Ahitub, why hast thou conspired against thy king?”

The high-priest stood forth. His face was pale, but his voice firm as he answered:

“Wherein have I conspired against the king?”

“You deny it?” Saul raved. “You deny that you gave to the son of Jesse both victuals and the sword of Goliath?”

“I do not deny that!” Ahimelech returned quickly, scanning the evil face of Doeg the Edomite, who stood close by the king. “I do not deny that! But I never thought of it as conspiracy. Is not David your son-in-law? Was there among all your servants a man so faithful and noble as he? Well I knew of the differences that existed, for a time, between my lord and David, but had not strict command been given that he should be honored again as before? How, then, could I refuse him sustenance and a weapon?”

Saul laughed a contemptuous laugh.

“Tut, tut!” he mocked. “Fine words, fine words. If you are true, if you are loyal, tell me why you inquired for him of Jehovah?”

Ahimelech looked full into the eyes of the king.

“Who says I inquired for him of Jehovah?” he queried, and his voice slightly trembled.

“Enough that I know it!” the king growled.

“But it is not true!” the high-priest declared vehemently. “Your servant has been maliciously slandered!”

"Doeg!" Saul cried.

The Edomite stood forth.

"Has Ahimelech inquired for David of Jehovah?"

"Yes, my lord the king!"

"You lie!" the high-priest thundered.

"I do not!"

"You do!"

The king interposed.

"Cease your protests, priest," he threatened.

"Confess your treason!"

"I speak words of truth, my lord the king," the priest said firmly. "It is Doeg who utters falsehood heinous and flagrant."

"Let not the king be swayed by the hypocritical quibbles of insincere priests!" the Edomite appealed to his master. "Ahimelech speaks not the truth."

"Of course not," Saul fumed. "His words are false. He has been proved guilty in two counts, surely he is guilty also in the third. He must die—he and all his ilk! Up, my men, draw sword! Slay the priests of Jehovah; because their hand is with David, and because they knew that he fled, and did not disclose it to me. Up, I say, and destroy them in my presence!"

But no one in Saul's bodyguard stirred to execute the behest. Callous as the king's men at arms were, they recoiled from so horrible a deed. It may be, too, that the very wording of the command, made them realize the ghastliness of it. But the king, instead of being sobered by the disobedience of his officers, grew more furious still. His fit of rage was so hot and imperious that he would not be balked. Who would execute his order? He quaked with impatience. His eyes swept over his

sullen courtiers—fiercely, menacingly. At last they rested on the gloomy visage of Doeg the Edomite. That was the man!

“Doeg,” the king exclaimed, “Doeg, turn you and fall upon the priests!”

The Edomite obeyed forthwith. With unsheathed sword he leaped on the high-priest, cleaving his head with a vicious stroke. “Hither, my men!” he shouted to those who served him, and some fifty soldiers as fiendish and cruel as himself left the ranks and aided their master in the savage butchery. Thus four score and five persons were murdered that wore the linen ephod—a garment which even in heathen nations secured protection and safety.

Saul looked on with gloating eyes. The smell of the blood and the sight of the slain served but to augment the hell that blazed in his breast. His vindictiveness craved still more blood. His ominous eyes viewed the city of Nob. Stretching forth his javelin he suddenly cried to his ghoulish servant:

“Well done, Doeg, well done! Now complete your task. Go into the city and smite it with the edge of the sword, and destroy both men and women, children and sucklings, oxen, asses, sheep, and all that has breath. Then burn up the town and make a heap of it!”

The Edomite executed the order remorselessly. When the sun set Nob existed no more. All its inhabitants had been put to the sword—all its houses had gone up in smoke and ashes.

The hideous deed struck terror to all the nation. Had Nob been a city of warriors that had resisted the king’s armies with haughty insolence, harassed them by sorties, entrapped them by stratagems, and

exasperated them by uncommon cruelty to their prisoners, it could not have had a more frightful doom. Saul's name was held in execration throughout the whole land. Every vestige of loyalty fled from the hearts of the people. They paid their taxes and submitted to his rule because he was still in power, but in their heart of hearts they began to turn to the son of Jesse for help and deliverance.

The influence of the murder upon the priesthood was prodigious. There was not a single priest or Levite in all the twelve tribes whose blood did not simmer at the news of the massacre, and whose sympathies were not immediately enlisted on behalf of David, now openly proclaimed by Saul as his rival. High and low everywhere lifted their hands in prayer to Jehovah for protection, and pleaded with the most High to make of David a blessing to the country.

But if the news of the massacre tended on the whole to improve and establish David's position with the people, it occasioned terrible pangs to his soul personally. One priest had escaped—Abiathar the son of Ahimelech. He came to the fugitive one day and narrated to him all that had occurred. David was moved beyond description.

"I knew it," he moaned, "that Saul would take vengeance. I knew it on the day when Doeg the Edomite met me in the house of God. Ah, I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house. Woe me! Woe me!" He covered his face with his mantle and wept. After a while he added: "But I am glad that you have come to live with me. Abide in my camp. He that seeks your life seeks mine: with me you will be safe."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE VICISSITUDES OF AN OUTLAW LIFE

David continued to stay in the forest of Hareth. The district which he occupied was a mountainous tract, bordering on the west coast of the Dead Sea, and lying exposed more or less to the invasions of the neighboring nations. In the distance a fine upland plain could be seen, remarkably rich and fertile; but between that plain and the Dead Sea the country changed into a barren wilderness. The rocky valleys that run down the margin of the sea, parched by the heat and drought, produce only a dry stunted grass. Even in our days innumerable caves are still to be seen, still affording shelter to outlaws and robbers.

It was quite a task to feed six hundred men in regions sequestered like these. Of course, if David had been unscrupulous—if he had been an ordinary freebooter, he would have had no difficulties in getting sustenance for himself and his men. But the king's son-in-law, though an outlaw, was no common robber. He had high ideals. He wished to keep both his conscience and his hands unstained. The only class of persons whom he and his band regarded as enemies were the open enemies of his country, that is to say, persons who either lived by plunder, or the tribes on which Saul, equally with himself, would have made war. If David had a weakness, it lay in his extraordinary partiality for his own people. It tore his heart to pieces to see

a Hebrew suffer. Instead of fleecing his own countrymen, he would give them aid wherever it was in his power. Needless to say, not all of his men thought that way. Now and then there were murmurings, but David remained firm. What the Hebrews did not willingly give, he would never wrest from them by force. One chief source of support was the chase. His companions caught wild goats and coneys, pigeons and partridges and other animals whose flesh was clean. They also engaged in guarding the flocks of neighboring shepherds both from beasts of prey and the raids of plundering bands, which services, occasionally, were richly rewarded. Nevertheless, at best it was but a most uncomfortable life to lead—a life full of privations, a life crowded with dangerous conflicts and hair-breadth escapes. For example: one morning an outpost would bring word that Saul's men had been descried in the distance. A hasty retreat would be effected. The outlaws would clamber over mountains and cliffs and reach their hiding place at night, exhausted from thirst, hunger and fatigue. Scarcely had they lain down, when, perhaps, an alarm would be given that a body of Bedouins were plundering a neighboring sheepfold. Forgetful of their fatigue they would rush to their arms, pursue the invaders, and rescue the prey. Next morning, perchance, the very men whose flock they had saved, would refuse to make due acknowledgment. At this murmurs would rise from David's hungry followers, and a way had to be found to overcome their discontent. To crown all David might learn by and by that the same people for whom he risked his life turned traitors and

disclosed to Saul his hiding place. It was wonderful that his faith endured in such trying and exciting times. But he was a poet. By music and song he perpetually strengthened his heart. Thus we find him one morning in the forest of Hareth, softly chanting the following lines, whilst his harp poured forth melodies tender and sweet:

“Jehovah answer me in the day of trouble;
 The name of the God of Jacob set me up on high;
 Send me help from the sanctuary,
 And strengthen me out of Zion;
 Remember all my offerings,
 And accept all my burnt sacrifices;
 Grant me my hearts desire
 And fulfill all my counsel.
 We will triumph in thy salvation,
 And in the name of our God we will set up our
 banners;
 Jehovah fulfill all my petitions.
 Now know I that Jehovah saveth me;
 He will answer me from his holy heaven
 With the saving strength of his right hand.
 Some trust in chariots and horses;
 But we will make mentions of the name of Jehovah
 our God.”

He had just about concluded his song when a commotion ensued in the camp. A little later a messenger was haled into his presence who reported that Keilah, a wealthy city about ten miles distant, had been attacked by the Philistines.

Keilah had walls and was, therefore, not itself in immediate danger. But there was plenty of

plunder to be obtained without: In their extremity the inhabitants, instead of sending to Saul for aid, had applied to David, believing that the outlaw would afford them quicker relief than their king.

It soon developed that they had not misplaced their trust. After some deliberation David marched in the direction of Keilah. With his dauntless band he descended upon the Philistine host, nearly three times as large in numbers, and, after a short conflict, put it to flight, and despoiled it of the booty already taken.

The inhabitants of the city exulted with joy. A great festival was celebrated, the relief troops were overwhelmed with felicitations, and their daring leader was given an ovation. The succeeding days were days of feasting and gladness. The outlaws, used to privations and wants, drank deeply from the cup of abundance held to their lips. Never before had they enjoyed such bountiful hospitality and ease.

But their pleasure and rest was of short duration. A traitor was found within the walls of Keilah, who thought it profitable to go to Gibeah to tell Saul where David was and what he had done. The king's dark eyes sparkled with delight. His adversary had done a foolish thing to shut himself up in a town that had walls and gates! Surely, the late triumph had blinded his eyes. Without delay Saul gave charge that Keilah be surrounded by a mighty host. He calculated that if the city were taken, the conspirators would all fall into his hands. He chuckled at the thought that David had put his foot into a trap from which there was no escape.

But the king, as usual, reckoned without his host.

As soon as Jonathan became aware of the scheme, he dispatched a messenger to his friend and advised him to leave at once his dangerous position, as his father was devising mischief against him. The information reached David in time.

"True Jonathan!" he whispered. Then he reflected. Where should he go? His men had found such a splendid retreat in this city. Must he so soon expose them to privations again? What if he remained in Keilah and quickly fortified the place still more? He rejected the thought. That would have exposed all the citizens to dire jeopardy. Besides, the men of Keilah might turn against him and deliver him up to Saul. No, it was better he fled.

A few hours later the outlaws quitted the city and sought another retreat. After some meandering, David, at last, led his men into the wilderness of Ziph. He had every reason to think that the Ziphites were favorably disposed to him, for his men had often protected their numerous flocks and served them in many other ways. But the Ziphites, though outwardly friendly and engaging, proved to be treacherous at heart. To ingratiate themselves with Saul, they secretly went to him, and not only informed him very particularly where David quartered, but actually invited him to come with his forces into their country in pursuit of his foe, making definite promises to be of aid in accomplishing his capture.

Saul thankfully received the news. He invoked on the informants the blessing of Jehovah, and advised them to search out all the haunts of his adversary, since they had to deal with a very subtle man,

promising them a very bountiful reward, and dismissing them graciously from his presence.

Woe to David if he had not had a faithful friend at the court of the king! The danger which threatened him now was greater than any that had confronted him heretofore, as he had never, for one moment, suspected the Ziphites of hypocrisy. On learning it from the messenger of Jonathan he was greatly disappointed.

"All men are liars!" he groaned. "Thou alone, Jonathan, art true and upright."

He gave instant command to his host to march still further southeast, where the "Jeshimon", or desert, shelves down into the Arabah, or low tableland. He tried to find a hiding-place between the wilderness Maon and the Dead Sea, but meantime the plan which Saul had suggested to the Ziphites was being only too faithfully carried out. Slowly and surely the royal army, guided by scores of traitors, was approaching the outlaws, drawing its net around them closer and closer. David perceived it from the mountain-top of Maon, whither he had finally withdrawn. His position was getting critical. His face blanched as he saw the men of Saul narrowing their circle.

"We cannot stay here," he said to himself "Soon our mountain is completely surrounded. We must flee again."

The eastern slope of Maon was still unoccupied. He must get down without delay if he would save himself from his remorseless pursuers. The king's soldiers were already clambering up the ascents at various places. To offer battle was useless, as Saul's host was far superior to his. Already he

was on the point of giving the command to undertake the descent, when Saul's trumpet rang out loudly and wildly. It was a signal of retreat. As David looked he saw his pursuers halt, then turn, and precipitately make again for the plain below. What had happened? Why did Saul call back his men?

A messenger had sped up to him poste haste, covered with dust and perspiration. "O king," he had cried, "O king, the Philistines!" and then he had swooned and glided from his beast.

"Give him wine!" the king charged his men.

It was done. The rider recovered his senses and reported that the Philistines had swarmed out of Gath and were raiding the country round about.

"They are even now taking the direction of Gibeah," he continued. "Therefore, O king, make haste, or you will come too late!"

Saul gnashed his teeth. He muttered a horrible imprecation. So he was balked again! If he gave chase to the outlaws a little longer they would surely fall into his hands, for to all appearance they could not escape. But in the meantime the Philistines might overrun Gibeah! They might lay waste all his estates! He raved and cursed. It was a wonder that he did not cut off the head of the unlucky messenger who thus spoiled his well-nigh successful expedition. Trembling with rage he blew his trumpet and summoned back his men. When the hunted outlaws, a little later, learned the reason of their sudden departure, they wept tears of joy. Presently their leader uncovered his head, poured out a prayer of thanksgiving, and directed that a sacrifice be offered to Jehovah. When the

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smoke in thick clouds rose far high from the altar. He gazed thoughtfully at the rugged cliffs upon which they now perched secure.

"Listen, my men," he suddenly said. "We ought to memorialize this deliverance of Jehovah. Henceforth let us call this mountain-top the Cliff of Escape!"

"Selah-hammalekem—the Cliff of Escape" a burst from the lips of his men.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RAPE OF MICHAL.

Saul had returned home with the greatest possible speed. The messenger had not overstated the facts. The Philistines were ravaging the country and had penetrated into the immediate neighborhood of Gibeon when he, at last, overtook them. They thought themselves safe, for their spies had assured them that the King of Israel was roaming in the wilderness of Ephraim. Laden with spoil as they were, they found it difficult to make a firm stand when they were so suddenly attacked. After a short struggle they took to their heels and fled.

Saul rejoiced at the victory, but it did not compensate him for the defeat sustained in the pursuit of David. His blood boiled at the thought that his foe was still free. It had been within an inch that he had captured him. The unlooked-for incursion of the Philistine hordes had frustrated all his calculations. That his expedition had thus miscarried

served but to add fuel to the flame of hate that blazed in his breast.

"Ha," he said to himself, "David no doubt laughed with delight at my departure! How he must have rejoiced over my misfortune and congratulated himself that Jehovah is with him! Confound it! I shall never catch him! I must think of another way to do him injury!"

He paced his room and thought.

"Yes," he muttered at last, "I must hurt him in Michal. Everybody else is clean escaped out of my hands. I must give Michal to Paltiel. In that way I reward my friend and punish my enemy."

The king rubbed his hands in glee. How David would rave when he heard the news that Michal had become Paltiel's wife! How he would pluck his hair in impotent fury! Ha, ha! It might kill Michal, for she loathed Paltiel exceedingly, but what did it matter? The throne must be saved!

But Jonathan—what about Jonathan? The king corrugated his brow. The young man had to submit. He refused to obey—if he showed himself rebellious, he would have him arrested and placed behind locks and bars. Thank God, he still held the sceptre!

That very day Saul talked to Paltiel and gave him Michal, calling him his son-in-law. The servant trembled with ferocious joy. It came so unexpectedly.

"Oh, my lord," he murmured, prostrating himself before the king. Suddenly he thought of the crown prince. "But Jonathan," he interrogated, lifting a worried face to his master.

"Leave him to me!" the king answered glower-

ingly. "Make haste. The sooner you kidnap her, the better it will please me. Besides, I give to you the house of David to live in. It is better than yours. Now go!"

With a profound obeisance Paltiel left his lord.

Since the flight of her husband, Michal had led a very retired life. She stayed with her mother the queen, who, still smarting under the insulting speech of the king at the feast of the new moon, was palpably declining. The only place which Michal frequented every forenoon, if the weather allowed, was the arbor in which David had first confessed his love. Here she would dream and muse and in her musings and dreamings imagine that she heard the soft tones of his harp, and the melodious cadence of his voice, as he sang and spoke.

How happy she had been! And now a sudden blight had descended upon her bliss. And it was her own father who had assassinated her joy! That was the pathetic feature of it. How cruel the king was to persecute her husband! What had David done? Wherein had he offended? Thus Michal would sit and think and enery.

Paltiel knew of the young woman's predilection for the arbor. Accordingly, he laid in wait for her the following morning. And Michal appeared as usual. She walked quite slowly—pensively. All her movements betrayed grace and elegance. In her hands she carried a harp.

The glittering eyes of Paltiel literally devoured her person. His lips parted, his nostrils dilated, his breath came hard. A smile of triumph settled on his face. Soon that woman would be his—his! The king had given her into his power. No one

would be able to dispute his title to her. His whole nature thrilled at the thought. Many long and tedious years he had waited. He had wooed the woman—honestly, ardently, perseveringly. She had spurned his hand. Hundreds of times she had let him feel that she despised and detested him—that she loathed and execrated him—that she disdained and scorned him. She had thought herself above him. Now he was her master—her lord—her husband! She was absolutely at his mercy—in his power. She should *feel* his power! She should *know* his strength! He would rule her with a rod of iron. He would break her haughty spirit and make her grovel in the dust. Yes, grovel in the dust, if need be. Of course, if she showed herself tractable—if she behaved sensibly—so much the better. But woe to her if she continued to wear her lofty mien—her proud look—in his presence! He would not tolerate it. No, he would not.

In the meantime Michal reached her bower. She sat down on the exact spot where she had sat when David whispered to her of his love. A little while she closed her eyes in contemplation. It would be hard to tell precisely the whence and whither of her thoughts. Her ideas were not distinct. They converged as in a dream. By and by she reached for her harp and played a few chords. She was not as skillful as David had been, notwithstanding she had grown quite clever. Sweetly the strains fell upon the breeze that stirred among the leaves. She loved this quiet hour. Her soul just craved for it. Oh, if her dear husband could have been at her side! If he could have been here with his harp to accompany her humble efforts, how

beautiful that would have been. But he was an outlaw. Some people called him robber, brigand, freebooter, and what not. She knew very well that David was anything rather than an ordinary robber or freebooter. An outlaw he was, but injustice had outlawed him. Evil men had driven him from his fireside. Unjust men chased him like a beast of prey in the land of Israel.

As she thought on these things, her eyes became moist. Ah, if David could have seen the tears she wept—for him! They would have filled his heart with bliss and joy. Did they not speak of the great love the king's daughter had for him—of the genuine affection that lived in her breast? Outlawed though he was—hunted though he was like a thing of the wildwood, David had much to be thankful for, since he possessed the love and affection of a pure and noble woman!

Did we say "possession"? Alas, he will have been despoiled also of her! Behold, a lecherous hand even now reaches forth to wrest her from him!

Michal suddenly started. She had heard a soft step in the path that led to her arbor. A dry limb had cracked under someone's foot. Who might it be? Who had the temerity to disturb her in her retreat? Occasionally Jonathan sought her out, but he had gone away hunting. As she lifted her eyes expectantly, a man stepped boldly into the entrance. It was Paltiel.

Michal looked at the intruder with angry eyes. What prompted this man to disturb her solitude? He knew that she despised him. He knew that she spurned to meet him. Why, then, did he come here?

How wickedly, how sinister, the man looked! His eye glowed with a light she did not like. It was such a malignant, menacing light. Michal's mind became filled with sudden apprehension. Why did the man remain unmovable in the door? Why didn't he go away? Why didn't he excuse himself and disappear?

"What do you want?" she asked indignantly.

Paltiel did not answer. Impudently his voluptuous eyes surveyed her person. Michal felt the blood surge to her cheeks. She rose erect.

"Get you gone!" she ordered.

Paltiel saw her quiver with resentment, but he only smiled triumphantly. Wrath but enhanced the charm and beauty of the woman before him. With gloating eyes he welcomed her passion. A great satisfaction swelled his breast. Really, there was no handsomer woman in all the realm!

Michal clinched her fists. She took a step toward the officer. Her cheeks burned with ire.

"Give place!" she cried.

Paltiel only smiled an insulting smile.

"Give place, I say!" the princess repeated, picking up her harp, and approaching him another step. Now Paltiel stirred.

"Oho," he sneered, "do not be in such haste, my dove!"

Michal almost dropped her instrument. What did that man say? What had he called her? "My dove?" A death-like pallor covered her face. There was a buzzing noise in her ears. Surely, the man was drunk. With wild eyes she regarded her father's servant who came nearer. She rallied herself.

"There!" she exclaimed, lifting high her harp, and, with the skill of a disk-thrower, dashing it into his face—"there's for your dove!"

Paltiel howled with pain. The instrument had struck him right between his eyes and bruised his nose.

"Confounded vixen!" he roared. "You she-fox, you shrew! That will cost you dearly!"

Bleeding from his nose and foaming at his mouth he threw himself upon the recoiling woman. Michal struggled fiercely, but soon her strength gave way under the sinewy grasp of her infuriated assailant. She made an effort to cry for help, but Paltiel promptly gagged her mouth with a cloth. When he had bound her hands and feet with leather thongs he brutally cast her into a corner of the bower, crossed his arms over his panting chest and considered her plight with lustful eyes.

"So, my gentle dove!" he mocked. "Now I have got you safe. I did not know that you were so quick-tempered. Well, it is good that I learned it so soon." He wiped his face with a kerchief and noticed the blood. A curse escaped his lips. "Whoever would have thought of that," he ejaculated. "But of course," he laughed insolently, "my coming was quite a surprise. My language even more. And yet I spoke the honest truth. You are my dove! Don't look at me as though you wished to eat me up! I mean it well with you, if only you promise to behave. I know you hate me. I know that you have an aversion to me. But overcome it. It will not do you any good. It only will make your condition worse. Henceforth you are my wife! Understand it? Oh, no, I do not lie,

as you seem to think. Nor am I mad. I speak the truth and am in full possession of my senses. The king, at last, has granted me the recompense that was my due."

Paltiel stepped into the entrance. He took a whistle from one of his pockets and put it to his lips. "Hist! hist! hist!" three sharp notes rang out. The signal given, he faced his prey again.

"Don't look so funereal," he said disapprovingly. "I am no cruel man. If I were sure that you would freely follow me, I should even untie your fetters. You forced me to use violence. Now I give you good advice: submit to me; make the best of your lot. If you do so, you will find me a congenial husband. But if you remain obstinate—if you mewl, and fret, and chafe, you have only yourself to blame if I do not always act like a gentleman. There," he interrupted himself, "I hear them coming."

Footsteps were heard. A few minutes later two men entered the arbor. Michal darted a quick look at them. They were both strangers to her. She did not discover a scintilla of sympathy written in their faces. They stared at her with stolid eyes.

"Pick her up!" Paltiel charged them.

The men took hold of the princess, who shrank with horror from their touch. But the two menials laughed. Rudely they lifted her from the ground and carried her without the arbor, where a closed sedan stood ready to receive her. The door closed, the chair was lifted, and the kidnapped woman was borne along.

A sedan is a common sight in the East. Nevertheless, Paltiel avoided the highway. He conducted

his men through fields and vineyards. Before a half an hour had passed his prey was safely lodged in what was once the house of David.

But Uriah, a lad devoted to Jonathan, and who had once already served as a bode to David, had witnessed the rape. Early in the morning when the prince had departed to hunt a hare or a partridge, he had charged the young man to keep watch over the princess. Thus Uriah had followed Michal into the garden and concealed himself, not far from the arbor, under the leafy branches of a vine. When, at about noon, his master returned from the chase, he told him succinctly what had occurred in his absence. Jonathan's breath came short as he listened to the story. When the lad had finished he went to the arbor to look for himself. He found the table overturned and the vines torn in various places. The chaotic condition bore mute but eloquent witness of a wild contest that had taken place. Near the entrance he noticed the shattered harp and a piece of blue ribbon. He picked up the articles, looked at them and groaned.

The next thing to do was to find out whether the king was aware of the rape. He was loath to believe it, but then again he said to himself that Paltiel would hardly have acted on his own responsibility. Boldly he confronted his father.

"Does the king know that Paltiel this morning kidnapped David's wife?" he asked, fixing a stern and accusing eye upon the monarch.

"Hum!" Saul replied testily. "Suppose I do know."

"Father!" Jonathan cried, and his cry was wild and terrific.

The king gave a start. His hand made a convulsive movement toward the javelin that lay ready as ever. But he did not pick it up. Flicking his fingers scornfully he said, angrily:

"Are you mad? Am not I king? Cannot I do what I please? Who is Michal? Is she not my daughter?"

"She is David's legitimate wife!" the prince, fearlessly, answered.

Saul shook his fists in the face of his son.

"David!" he shouted. "David! Ha, you disobedient child! You do not cease to support the scourge of the nation. I know well that you are in league with him. Shame and disgrace on your head! David—ha, if I had him in my power I would show him a thing!"

The king's eyes grew bloodshot. Foam was forming at his mouth. His teeth gnashed on each other that it grated on Jonathan's ears. He saw that it was time to withdraw. He could not move his father to clemency. Nothing else remained but to tell David. Casting at the king a look of unspeakable sorrow, not unmixed with resentment, he left his presence and went to the queen. His spirit was nearly crushed. His body ached as though it had been subjected to the tortures of the rack.

That very afternoon he despatched Uriah to David to apprise him of the rape of his wife.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RESCUE

David was no longer in the wilderness of Maon. After Saul's departure, he had taken a north-west-erly course. A march of six or seven hours brought him to Engedi, "the fountain of the goats", which, leaping down a considerable height in a thin cascade, converts that desert into a luxuriant oasis. In this plain, or rather slope, about one mile and a half from north to south, at the base of rugged limestone mountains, in a climate delicious and mild, the city of Engedi had stood—perhaps the oldest place in the world!

David remembered that through this city the hordes of Chedorlaomer had passed when they swept like stormclouds over the countries. In the distance the eye of the fugitive noticed the districts where once had stood the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which God had destroyed. In fact, his eyes could sweep the whole country far up the Jordan valley, and across the Dead Sea to the mountains of Moab. Quite close to the waters of that sea, on which the doom of judgment has ever since rested, a scene of tropical beauty and wealth stretched, such as it is scarcely possible to describe. Bounded by two perennial streams, between which the Engedi itself makes its way, it had the appearance of a little paradise. The plain was covered with palm-trees. The slopes of the hills were decked with the choicest vineyards of Judea,

scented with camphire. But all above was wilderness, bare, round limestone cliffs rising from two hundred to four hundred feet, burrowed with numberless caves, to which the entrance, sometimes, was inaccessible.

These were "the rocks of the wild goats", and here in a cave, known as that of Wady Charitum, which was spacious enough to give shelter to thousands of men, David had sought refuge from the pursuit of the king. The cave had immense lateral chambers which ran off at an angle from the main cavity, admitting little or no light, but such that a person inside, while himself unseen, might observe what occurred without.

Uriah, of course, knew nothing of David's new hiding place. Jonathan had commissioned him to seek his friend in the wilderness of Maon. Arrived in Maon, Uriah found no trace of the outlaws. The shepherds of the district were able to give him but little information. No one was aware of their exact haunt. Only so much had been discovered that they had departed in the direction of Engedi. Uriah made up his mind to proceed thither. It was toward evening of the next day, when, after much searching and inquiring, he at last found David's retreat.

When the outlaw captain had heard the news he covered his face with his garment and groaned. That which he had always feared had now happened! But there was no time to weep and moan. Michal must be saved!

From Engedi to Gibeah was a distance of eighteen miles. David calculated that if he set out at once, he would reach the city at about midnight. It was

to be expected that Paltiel had taken precautions to meet a possible attempt on the part of his rival to liberate his wife, but Paltiel would hardly expect that attempt to be made so soon. The earlier, therefore, the rescue of Michal was undertaken, the more likely it was to prove successful.

David's plan was soon formed. Accompanied by a score of picked men on asses, he would immediately ride toward Gibeah. Four hundred men, on foot, were to follow him with the greatest possible speed. Two hundred men were to remain in the cave to guard the provisions. The necessary orders given, David and his men rode swiftly away, the body of his band following as rapidly as they could.

The inhabitants of Gibeah were sleeping when the daring outlaws drew near their city. It was a dark night. Only in the palace of the king there was light. The royal court was carousing. David was sure that Paltiel, favorite of Saul that he was, attended his master.

Leaving their asses in the care of two of their companions, outside the town, the other outlaws cautiously entered and penetrated farther and farther. In single file they slipped along. No one stopped their progress. David directed their way and led them to what had once been his house.

The place was illuminated. Through an open window a coterie of soldiers could be observed, engaged in playing dice. Two sentinels marched with measured steps in opposite directions about the house. A room in the second story was dimly lighted by a candle.

The first thing to be done was to surprise and disarm the two sentinels. David called four of his

men and gave them instructions. The outlaws disappeared in the dark. A little later they returned with pride. The troublesome watchmen lay fettered behind a vine in the garden. Now came the second act.

David charged ten of his men to follow him into the house, and commanded the rest to keep watch outside. Then he boldly went forward.

The playing soldiers suspected no harm. They had grown quite hilarious. So absorbed were they in their game that not one of them had noticed the stranger step into the hall where they sat. Presently a strong voice alarmed them.

"Hands up!" David cried.

Every hand, involuntarily, went up.

"You are all my prisoners," David continued.

"The man who stirs is a child of death."

The servants of Paltiel were almost palsied with terror.

"David!" they whispered through chattering teeth, and meek as lambs they permitted themselves to be bound and gagged.

"Where is the princess?" David demanded of one of the men.

"Upstairs!" the soldier replied.

"In the room to the south-east, where the light burns?"

"Yes."

David raced upstairs. He stood before the door. He knocked. No answer. He knocked again. Same result.

"Michal!" he cried.

An exclamation was heard within.

"Michal!" David repeated.

"David!" it burst from a woman's lips, and a trembling hand pushed back the bolt.

"Yes, it is I, my love. Open quickly!"

The next instant the door opened and Michal flung herself at the bosom of her husband.

"O David," she moaned, "is it really you? O David!"

The princess could say no more. Sobs choked her voice. David kissed her ardently and held her in close embrace. But there was no time for endearments now. Every minute was precious.

"Quickly, my love, we must flee!" he said.

Michal realized the situation. She composed herself in a trice. Nimble as a roe she leaped down the stairs at the side of her husband.

David's men had completed their work. Every soldier lay fettered and muzzled. They were very quiet. They did not dare to make a single movement. Some, however, looked with sulky eyes at the men who had bound them. It dawned upon their minds that they had been surprised by but a handful of outlaws. They felt ill at ease at the thought of their master's coming home.

David and his men quitted the house. They hastened cautiously back to where their companions guarded the asses. No signal of alarm was given. No obstacle was placed into their way. Unobserved they reached their beasts and galloped off into the night.

The king's nobles were still enjoying their debauch. They were in high spirits. A week of feasting and carousing had been promised them in honor of the wedding to be solemnized between Paltiel and Michal on the following evening. What

wonder that they grew boisterous with glee at the prospect of the sumptuous convivialities.

Saul regarded with an odd look the noisy revelers before him. The expression on his face was rather cynical. All these officers, and captains, and courtiers, were creatures of his own making. They cringed and fawned, but they did not love him. Their dominant passion was cupidity. The quintessence of their being was hypocrisy. They flattered him to his face, and sniggered and sniffed behind his back. That he knew very well, but he was powerless to effect a change. His days of real bliss were past and gone. Henceforth he must be satisfied with counterfeited joys.

He emptied his goblet of wine at a draught. A servant officiously refilled it. Dreamily the king's eyes wandered from courtier to courtier. Now and then it appeared as though he would make a remark, but his lips remained closed.

Suddenly a commotion ensued at one of the large entrance doors. Soldiers appeared. Outcries were heard. The tumult increased and a sudden terror seized all the guests.

Paltiel recognized his men. Pale as a sheet he rose from the board and strode to the door where the confusion obtained.

"What is it?" he cried.

A soldier reported rapidly what had taken place. The man had succeeded in freeing himself from his bands. He had cut the fetters of his companions and they all had hurried to the palace.

"How strong was the force?" Paltiel demanded.

"About thirty or forty men."

"And they carried away the princess?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And it occurred when?"

"About an hour ago."

Saul came up that instant.

"What has happened?" he asked.

Paltiel repeated the unpleasant news. The king's countenance turned livid with rage. Tripped again! The son of Jesse had had the boldness to show himself in the very shadow of the court? It was intolerable! An end must be put to his doings. As long as that villain roamed at large, he, Saul, was king but in name!

"Pursue at once with a hundred men!" he charged Paltiel, who, likewise, was aquiver with wrath. "Get the fellow dead or alive! Make haste!"

Saul's command was hurriedly obeyed. The fleetest asses were hurriedly selected from the royal stable, and Paltiel, at the head of the band, went in pursuit of the daring outlaws.

The chase was anything but easy. It was still dark. Moreover, David had quite a start and no one knew with certainty just where his retreat was. It seemed probable, though, that his horde was still in the neighborhood of Ziph, south of Gibeah. Paltiel, therefore, quickly resolved, took that direction. He was determined to win back the woman. He rode so rapidly that his followers found it difficult to keep up with him.

On the cavalcade flew. It began to dawn. The eastern sky became streaky with light. The stars paled and disappeared. Paltiel, with glittering eyes, searched the landscape before him. His teeth were set. His lips compressed. Presently he raised himself in the saddle. Far in the distance he had

descried some moving objects. There was no mistake. He was hot upon the heels of the outlaws.

"Quick, my men!" he urged his band. "There! See them? They cannot escape! Make haste!"

On they sped. It seemed incredible that asses could be spurred to display the rapidity they showed on this occasion. They hardly seemed to touch the ground. It became evident in a little while that the pursuers gained on the fugitives. Paltiel perceived it and his eyes glowed with the fire of hate and revenge.

"Keep up the pace, my men," he cried, "we have got the start of them. A royal reward to all of you if they do not escape!"

The outlaws, it appeared, had observed the pursuers. They exerted themselves desperately to get away. But their asses were tired out. They had covered quite a distance the night before. It became as plain as the day that they could not endure much longer.

"They are ours!" Paltiel exulted. "They cannot get away. See, how their beasts stagger! Hurry up, my brave men, it's precious game that we are after!"

With redoubled speed the pursuers swept on. A wood had just received the fugitives. Paltiel knew that at the other side of it was an extensive plain. David was likely to make the plain, but farther he could not escape.

"Forward, my men!" Paltiel shouted. "Forward!"

It was but a small wood. With the utmost rapidity the pursuers dashed through it. They saw the outlaws plunge into the plain. Now they themselves issued forth from the shadow of the trees,

close upon the trail of the fugitives. Already their breasts swelled with ferocious joy at the thought of success, when suddenly, they found themselves confronting a troop. With terror-stricken eyes they saw before them, but two hundred rods away, a band of men numbering many hundreds, in whose midst the fugitives disappeared.

Paltiel and his men almost rode into their very ranks. With difficulty they checked their beasts and wheeled them about. Nearly palsied with fear they tried to regain the wood. Now the tables were turned. Those who had been pursuers before now fled for their lives. As for Paltiel, having been in the van in the pursuit, he now found himself in the rear at the retreat. That was to prove his undoing. David's men came closer and closer. Their yells and shouts sounded desperately near. He wanted to pass by his men, but could not. The little wood was full of underbrush, and the path was exceedingly narrow. Already he heard the panting of the asses of his pursuers. His heart palpitated with apprehension. His eyes grew bloodshot. His teeth gnashed on each other. His face became wan. His hands clutched frantically at the mane of his ass, whilst with his heel he cruelly belabored the poor beast's flanks.

Presently he uttered a piercing scream. His hands grasped the air. A second later he fell backwards to the earth. A few of his men turned round at the scream, but no one thought of coming to his aid. With increased celerity they hastened away.

David's men followed them through the wood and about a mile further, then they gave up the pursuit.

They were in the minority, for only a few asses had been available.

They picked up Paltiel and laid him before their captain. The courtier was dead. The dart had been mortal and the fall fatal—the former had penetrated his heart, the latter had broken his neck. David and Michal were deeply moved. In silence they gazed on their relentless foe—now removed forever. Finally David spoke:

“Jehovah has rewarded him according to the iniquity of his heart!” he said, clasping to his bosom the shrinking form of his wife. “Up, my men, let us return to Engedi.”

CHAPTER XXV.

DAVID SPARES THE KING

At the calamitous report of Paltiel's men Saul was seized with a fit of madness. His fury overflowed all bounds. Paltiel dead! His daughter gone! David the victor of the day! It was more than he could bear. Without delay he gathered an army of three thousand men and once more, in person, undertook to pursue the robber chief.

He went forth in a south-eastern direction. The people of the various districts through which the king passed, supplied what information they could. Although the treacherous spirit which was so prevalent aided him to discover in a general way the whereabouts of the outlaws, he remained in practical ignorance of the exact location of their camp.

On the third day he came to the "rocks of the wild goats". It was a hot day, and the sun was at its zenith. Since his men were overcome with heat and fatigue, he commanded them to pitch their tents and to rest a while. He himself sauntered away from the army and clambered desultorily among the limestone formations. When some of his courtiers prepared to follow him, he signified to them that he wished to be alone, a wish which none of them seemed to deplore.

Saul had often heard of the "rocks of the wild goats", but he had never before seen the wild and rugged hills with his own eyes. When he looked at the chaotic formations about him, he saw a true picture of himself. As torn and as wild as was the landscape before him, was the heart that beat within his breast. Somehow the scarred and fissured scenery on which his eyes rested, soothed and calmed the tempest within him. Amidst the riven rocks his high-strung nerves appeared to lose their terrible tension. And now a feeling of leaden fatigue came over him. He looked about for a place to shelter him from the singeing rays of the sun. As his eyes viewed the sides of the hills they perceived a cave. Slowly he walked towards its mouth, entered it, threw his mantle on the ground, stretched himself upon it, and slumbered.

It was the cave of Wady Chàritim!

Hidden in the farthest recesses of the cave were outlaws, who, with bated breath, had seen the king approach and recline. What an opportunity for their captain! Now he could rid himself of his implacable foe. Divine providence had given Saul into his hands!

Ahimelech the Hittite, and Abishai the son of Zeruiah, stepped close to their leader and urged him not to neglect so splendid an opportunity.

"Behold," they whispered, "the providence of Jehovah! Your enemy has been given into your hands. Do not tarry. Do to him as seems good to you!"

David did not stir. He appeared not to have heard. The two men grew impatient. Their captain was too slow—too deliberative. The king might get up and then the golden opportunity would have passed away. They moved closer.

"Command us to avenge ourselves on your adversary," they pressed feverishly. "Command us to slay him!"

Others crept near to support their request, but David shook his head.

"Stay here," he ordered. "I myself shall deal with my foe!"

Stealthily he moved forward. His men followed his movements with breathless attention. They asked themselves what David might have resolved to do. If he killed Saul, they all, at one stroke, would be delivered from the weary life they were leading—a life that more resembled the life of wild beasts than the life of civilized men. Moreover, if David killed Saul, there was no more powerful man left in the kingdom, and it was not unlikely that in time to the slayer of Saul there would fall the crown. But if David became king, those who had been with him in the days of his humiliation would without a doubt be his favorite counselors when his glory began. Added to these selfish considerations was the fact that the king had so unexpectedly

placed himself into their power. Surely, it was the providence of God that had guided him into the cave where David was hiding. Now to let such an opportunity slip by was equal to pushing aside the hand of Jehovah.

No one was more deeply moved than Michal. She had just issued forth from one of the lateral chambers, which had been fitted up for her. One of the outlaws had apprised her of the advent of her father. With burning eyes she watched the form of her husband, as he crept nearer and nearer to the king. She perceived that in his right hand he carried a short unsheathed sword. What was David going to do? Was he going to plunge the deadly weapon into the heart of her father? . . .

She wished to cry to warn the unsuspecting sleeper, but her tongue refused to move. She loved David—she loved him ardently, tenderly, passionately. The king had wronged both him and her. He had been infinitely cruel. He had insulted the queen and attempted the life of Jonathan. His hands were wet with the blood of innocent priests. But still—he was her father! Should David spill his blood while she looked on?

Now he had reached the king. She saw him bend over the prostrate body—she saw him crouch and cut away at something. Michal's heart threatened to stop. What was David doing? Now he rose again. What had he done? As slowly and as cautiously as he had crept away, she saw him return to his men.

What had David done?

When he approached his tireless persecutor no fixed purpose was present to his mind. He felt

himself pushed along by a power not his own. He did not resist that mysterious force. He did not even try to understand it. He simply submitted to it.

When he reached the slumbering monarch of Israel and looked into his face, a wave of pity and compassion surged through his soul. So many necessary duties remained undischarged. The enemies of Israel, on every hand, again lifted up their heads, and he whose privilege it was to lead the nation to victory and rule the tribes in equity was pursuing an imaginary foe! David thought of what Saul might have been if he had remained obedient to Jehovah. Having lost touch with God he had become despicable in his doings. And now he lay there in the impotence of ignorance. One thrust with the sword he held in his hand and the unfit ruler of Israel ceased to trouble the nation. Should he do it?

David recoiled at the very thought. He who slept at his feet was the anointed of Jehovah—he was the father of both Michal and Jonathan! No, he would never stain his hand with the blood of the king. If Saul believed him to be his enemy, he would this day convince him that his fear had no foundation. He stooped down, took hold of the mantle on which the king was lying, and, with the sword in his hand, cut off one of its fringed corners. Harmless as the act had been, David felt his heart beat quicker.

And now he retraced his steps to rejoin his comrades. He knew that they would regard what he had done with disapproval. He knew that they would demand the death of the king. Well, he was prepared to oppose them.

The outlaws had witnessed with genuine disappointment that Saul had come off unharmed. With subdued voices, but with fierce determination, they importuned their chief to end their privations. But David remained firm.

"Jehovah forbid," he replied, "that I should do this thing unto my lord, Jehovah's anointed, to put forth my hand against him. Nay, my men, do not imagine such a wicked thing!"

Notwithstanding, it was with difficulty that he restrained his followers. Their murmuring sounded ominously. Michal alone was glad. She came to his side and gratefully pressed his hand.

Presently the king stirred. He rose, stretched himself calmly as if unconcerned, and nonchalantly left his cool and quiet resting-place.

Signaling to his men to remain in the cave, David softly followed the king without, rapidly scaled a steep rock that stood nearby, whence flight would have been easy, and all of a sudden startled his foe by calling his name in a clear, penetrating voice.

Saul faced about and stood still as if rooted to the spot. Was he dreaming? Had not somebody cried his name, and had not the voice of that somebody been David's voice? With perplexed eyes he stared into the wild solitude. His face assumed a haggard expression.

There! Again the voice rang forth, and now the king saw upon the peak of a tooth-like limestone the man, who, as his disordered passion had suggested, and as his courtiers had averred, was seeking his life. Saul stood and gazed and his amazement, not unmingled with fear, increased.

"My lord the king!" David now exclaimed, making a profound bow.

Saul continued his mute stare.

"My lord the king," the fugitive resumed, "wherefore do you hearken to evil men who say that I seek your hurt? Behold, this day Jehovah had delivered you into my hands in the cave yonder which you left but a moment ago. I might have killed you, but mine eye spared you, for I said, I will not put forth my hand against my lord; for he is Jehovah's anointed. Look, my father, observe what I have in my hand! Is it not the skirt of your garment? I cut it off when you were slumbering there at my feet. Yea, my father, I cut it off with the sword I hold in my hand!" He held up the glittering weapon. "Now in that I cut off a piece of your robe and slew you not when I might have done it, know and see plainly that there is neither evil nor transgression in my heart, and that I have not sinned against you, though you seek after my life to take it!"

David paused. When no answer was vouchsafed him he proceeded passionately:

"There is an ancient proverb that says, 'Out of the wicked cometh forth wickedness!' If this proverb is true, must not the king consent that I am innocent? If I were seeking the life of my lord, as some say, was it not in my power to-day? What, then, is the meaning of the king's pursuit? After whom is the king of Israel come out? Whom does he pursue? A dead dog? A tiny flea? Yea, my lord king, Jehovah give judgement between you and me, and see and plead my cause, and deliver me out of your hand!"

Words like these, of which the truth was so evident, could not but make their way even to the heart of Saul. Touched in his tenderest feelings by the singular generosity of his opponent, he lifted up his voice and wept. For a moment the dark clouds which had gathered around his soul and prevented the light penetrating it, were dissolving and scattering. An inner voice told him that David was true and just, that he was honest and faithful, and that the courtiers who slandered his name were sniveling, driveling slaves.

"My son," he faltered, "stay your voice! Yes, your cause is just. You are upright. You are more righteous than I, for you have rendered me good for evil. You have shown this day your integrity, in that when Jehovah had delivered me into my your hand, you slew me not but spared my life. I know the proverb you speak of. It is true. If a man finds his enemy will he let him go? Wherefore Jehovah reward you good for the goodness shown me to-day." Saul bowed his head for an instant, then rising erect he continued in a voice surcharged with pathos: "David, I know that you will be king—I know that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. Therefore swear to me now by Jehovah, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house!"

Now it was David's turn to lose his composure.

"My lord the king," he faltered, "my lord the king—I—no—it cannot be—ah, if my father would but cease to regard me as—as——"

"Nay, my son," Saul interrupted the fugitive, "do not dispute my words. I know that Samuel has

chosen you as prince of the house of Israel. He poured on your head the anointing oil. The decree has gone forth: the kingdom will be yours. Therefore, I pray you, swear to me in the name of Jehovah that my house shall be safe!"

David's emotion was boundless.

"My father," he cried, "I showed you to-day that my heart is free from malice. Never, never, whilst I live, shall I devise mischief against your head or your house."

"Swear it to me by Jehovah!" Saul insisted.

Then David lifted his hand to the sky and confirmed his promise by an oath. The king was satisfied. He bowed his head, turned round, and slowly walked away.

An hour later the outlaws observed that the royal army decamped. The pursuit had been abandoned.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PROPHET EXPLAINS

David had been stirred to the depths of his soul. The king still believed him to be his successor to the throne! Was it not madness?

He considered his discontented band and smiled a bitter smile. Did not his very followers seem to discredit his divine vocation?

But the anointing, the anointing!—What *was* its meaning if Saul and Jonathan were wrong?

In his aimless wanderings—in his flights and retreats—he had almost forgotten the solemn words

of his friend at the stone of Ezel. Now they came back to him with great force and disturbed the serenity of his mind.

He must end this uncertainty! He must know the truth! Thus far his humility had prevented him from asking the prophet to grant him an explanation. But he could endure no longer to continue in doubt and suspense. He would send to Ramah. He would crave information.

Such were David's thoughts on the day after the departure of Saul when a messenger was ushered into his presence, who, by the garb he wore, revealed himself as a student of the Law. The youth's face was sad and serious. And sad and grave as his face was the news which he brought.

"Samuel," he said, "is dying, and commands David to come without delay to his bedside."

Samuel sick—sick unto death! And at this critical juncture in the history of the nation, when his counsel and guidance were so imperatively needed! Could Jehovah permit it?

He rose, gave some hurried orders to his men, and straightway set out on the journey.

The citizens of Ramah were in great excitement. It was whispered from mouth to mouth that Samuel was not expected to live. There were many who thought to have had reason to complain when the Seer administered the affairs of the nation. They had resented his severity and stern justice. But afterwards they had repented themselves. A comparison of Saul's rule with that of Samuel's showed them the infinite superiority of the prophet. Thus even these men now had become his friends. The general conviction obtained that no man except

Moses had ever done more for the nation than Samuel. His life-long aim and effort had been to direct the attention of the people to Jehovah. He had been conspicuous in denouncing cold formality and dead ritual. He had called upon living men to serve the living God. He had not been occupied with such stirring events as Moses, neither had it been his function to reveal the will of God. His great spirituality, his intense reverence for the God of Israel, his profound belief in the covenant between Israel and God—these had been the things that had characterized his life.

He had been the child of a pious mother, who had dedicated him to Jehovah from the hour of his birth. As soon as he was weaned, she had brought him to the temple, where he had served in Eli's the high priest's presence. When but a lad of twelve years the Lord had called his name and revealed to him the downfall of the house of Eli. Thus he had grown up in the shadow of the Tabernacle of God. Later he had become judge of the nation. In righteousness and equity he had discharged his duty. The greatest distress in his life had been when Israel had demanded a king. After much expostulation he had granted their request. The evils foreseen by him had all come to pass: vainglory, extravagance, and despotism on the part of the king; loss of liberty, increased taxation and consequent impoverishment on the part of the nation. From a quiet retrospect of Samuel's life there came to every one a wholesome rebuke to their worldliness and neglect of God, and a bidding to serve him better in the future.

Toward afternoon of the day that followed the

visit of the prophet's messenger to David, the school at the Naioth was discontinued, and the sons of the prophets walked in solemn procession down the height to gather in the court of Samuel's house. The whole city imitated the example. Young and old, rich and poor, came out and thronged about the Seer's premises. Many eyes were moist. Every face was grave.

Suddenly the people were moved by the arrival of two men on asses who seemed to have traveled a long way, for their garments were bedabbled with dust, and their countenances showed signs of fatigue, whilst the beasts on which they rode were streaming with perspiration. Without looking right or left, the two men pressed on, the people, respectfully, giving them passage.

"David!" an Israelite whispered.

"The hope of the nation!" murmured another.

"Jehovah bless him!" quoth a third.

The outlaw chief entered the chamber where Samuel was lying. He approached his bedside and fell on his knees.

"My father!" he wailed.

The Seer placed his hand on the head of the son of Jesse. A gleam of joy illuminated his face.

"Ah, it is you, my son," he said. "It is well that you have come." He paused as if to collect his thoughts. "Gad," he addressed a servant who stood at the foot of the bed, "call in the sons of the prophets."

Samuel closed his eyes. His hand remained on the head of David, who had covered his eyes with his hands. Slowly, softly, the students of the law entered the room. Their eyes rested sadly on the

face of the Seer who had taught them the oracles of God. Samuel looked up. An expression of affection transfigured his countenance. Leaving his right hand to rest on the head of the kneeling outlaw, he pointed at him with his left hand and cried:

“Behold the king of Israel!”

David rose to his feet. His face was pale, his whole frame trembled. With a wild and haggard glance he regarded the dying prophet.

“My father!” he moaned.

But Samuel remained calm.

“My son,” he said, “it is time that I grant you an explanation. Behold, I die, but before I depart I must reveal to you that when I anointed your head in the house of your father’s, Jehovah had sent me to choose you to be prince over the house of Israel. Fear not, for what I have declared will surely come to pass. All your enemies shall be brought to contempt, and you shall be king over the tribes. Be faithful and true. Walk in all the precepts and commandments of the law. Turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. When you rule in the place of Saul, establish justice and truth in the land.”

The prophet ceased. The exertion had fatigued him. A solemn silence ensued. The outlaw chief stood before the bed like a statue.

“Salute your king!” the Seer’s voice suddenly addressed the sons of the prophets.

All bowed themselves to the earth.

“Now kneel before Jehovah,” the prophet, thereupon, charged David.

Mechanically the young man kneeled down. Once

more Samuel placed his hand on David's head and said:

"May Jehovah of hosts hide thee from the secret counsel of evil-doers, from the tumult of the workers of iniquity; may he bless thy going out and thy coming in; may he crown thy rule with justice and right, break in pieces the oppressor, and grant peace and prosperity to the king and to Jacob. Amen!"

"Amen!" echoed the sons of the prophets.

David perceived that the hand on his head trembled and slowly glided away from its support. He caught it and anxiously scanned the face of the Seer. He was dead. Overcome with grief the young man sobbed aloud. Then, rallying himself, he bowed over his protector and teacher and tenderly closed his eyes. This done, sorrow again obtained the upperhand. He rent his clothes according to the custom of the times, unlaced his sandals, covered his mouth with a cloth, placed his hand on his face, and moaned piteously.

His example was instantly imitated by the bystanders. All rent their clothes to the very nether garments and threw away their footwear. The people outside tore their turbans from their heads, sprinkled dust and ashes on their hair, and even clipped their beards. The whole city was turned into a camp of mourners. Many people walked about stark naked to indicate their grief. Others mutilated their bodies, shaved their hair or sat in dust and ashes. Not a few gathered together in groups and wept and shouted or chanted peculiar and weird rhythmic lamentations. Still others sped

home to prepare a sumptuous funeral repast, to be eaten in honor of him who had died.

In the meantime the body of Samuel was washed and anointed by competent persons. Thereupon it was arrayed in the best garments which the prophet had worn while living. His hands and feet were bound with grave bands, and his face veiled with a fine napkin. Then the corpse was placed on a bier.

When the sun had set six pall-bearers, selected from the sons of the prophets, carried the body into the garden behind the house, and deposited it in a rock-hewn tomb. With the body they buried a number of objects which Samuel had used during his life—his inkhorns and pens, writing-tablets, a few scrolls, and a number of keys. Now the mouth of the sepulchre was closed with a heavy stone, and great piles of fragrant spices were burned by its side, whilst the company of mourners sang funeral dirges and chanted lamentations. Every one felt that a great man in Israel had passed away.

The next day David returned to the wilderness of Engedi.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SPARED AGAIN

Three months had passed since Samuel's death. Saul's repentance had been of short duration. Soon after his return to Gibeath the enemies of David succeeded in again poisoning his mind. On every act of David's they put the worst construction

that could be imagined. Saul, in whose breast jealousy was only too active, soon cursed his weakness in the wilderness of Engedi and again undertook the pursuit. He made Abner, a cousin of his, commander in chief of the host, and Doeg the Edomite his armor-bearer.

Doeg was a worthy successor to Paltiel. When he perceived the growing restiveness of the people, he said, "This is the work of David!" When the taxes came in slowly, he was quick to attribute the cause to the outlaw. Everything he twisted and contorted to blacken the name of David in the eyes of Saul, who listened all too willingly to the vilifications of his servant.

David had departed from Engedi and sojourned once more in the wilderness of Ziph. Thither Saul led his army, resolved to make an end of his foe this time. Jonathan, concerned as ever for the safety of his friend, had sent him timely warning, and so we find David intrenched on the slope of the hill of Hachilah, whence he watched the approach of the host of the king.

It was toward evening when the pursuers arrived. They pitched their tents in the valley below, partook of their victuals, and retired.

In the early watches of the night David called to himself Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai the son of Zeruiah, and requested them to accompany him on a reconnoitering excursion to the camp of Saul. Under cover of darkness the three men crept through the brushwood until they came to the royal host. On a height just above it they waited for the dawning of the day. When at last the thick darkness was scattered they beheld the whole army

asleep, and Samuel himself but two hundred rods away from the foot of the rock on which they were standing. At his head a spear stuck in the ground, at his right hand stood a cruse of water, and close by his side lay Doeg his armor-bearer and Abner the chief of the host. All around slept the common soldiers. If sentinels had been stationed the evening before, they must have thought it superfluous to watch, for the three men failed to see a single man awake.

Abishai was thrilled at the sight. A fierce resolution shone in his eyes.

"My lord," he accosted David.

"What is it, Abishai?"

"My lord, behold your enemy! You spared him once, and it was well. But what shall you do to-day? Shall you let him escape a second time?"

"Do not tempt me, Abishai. He is the Lord's anointed!"

"Nay, my lord, Jehovah long ago rejected him. You are the anointed henceforth, as all the prophets and priests declared throughout the realm. Saul's hands are dripping with blood. Therefore, do not hesitate to smite him to the earth!"

"Stop, Abishai," David cried. "Far be it for me to heed your words. No, I shall not avenge myself."

"Then let me smite him, my lord. Has not God delivered him into your hand? Behold, I shall go over to him and smite him to the earth with his own spear!"

"Nay, Abishai," David replied firmly, "I shall not permit it. Stay; destroy him not. For who can put forth his hand against Jehovah's anointed and

be guiltless? As Jehovah lives, I shall spare his life. But Jehovah will plead my cause."

Both Abishai and Ahimelech looked glum. The opportunity was so favorable, the temptation so great. David saw their discontent and rose to his feet.

"Stay here," he said, "and watch what I shall do. If necessary, come to my aid."

He left his servants and descended into the valley. Cautiously he approached the sleeping monarch, took possession of the spear at his head and the cruse of water at his side, and returned to the height whence Abishai and Ahimelech, not without grave misgivings, had observed his movements. David now planted himself in a prominent position, and, at the top of his voice, shouted a ringing defi.

The drowsy sleepers rubbed their eyes and stared stupidly about. Who dares break the king's slumber in the midst of his camp? There it is again! Powerfully a voice re-echoes over the valley. As they gaze into the direction whence it comes, they see on the peak of a rock a man who twirls with his right hand a spear above his head, and holds in his left hand an earthen cruse. Who is the man?

"Ho," the voice resounds, "ho, Abner, thou son of Ner, answerest thou not? Ho, Abner, art not thou a valiant man? and who is like thee in Israel? Wherefore then hast thou not kept watch over thy lord the king? For there came one of the people to destroy your royal master. This thing is not good that thou hast done. As Jehovah liveth, thou art worthy to die, because thou hast not kept watch over thy lord, Jehovah's anointed. See where the king's spear is, that was at his head, and the cruse

of water, that was at his side. Thou art a faithful guardian, indeed!"

The amazement and fury of Abner were boundless. He turned to the king who looked pale and troubled.

"Let me go and cut off his head," he entreated.

But Saul answered him with a frown. He had been rudely roused from a dream in which David had again saved his life. At the end the shadowy figure of Samuel had appeared upon the scene. His face had been stern and accusing. He had lifted his finger threateningly and had said, "Take heed, that thou cease to pursue my servant David!" And now the king awoke to find the dream partly true. His superstition was excited.

"Is this your voice, my son David?" he faltered.

Clear and vibrant the answer came back:

"Yes, it is my voice, my lord, O king. Wherefore do you pursue after your servant? What have I done? what evil is in my hand? I pray you, listen to the words of your servant. If it be Jehovah who stirs you up against me, let us join in making our peace with him, and offer him a sacrifice: but if it be the children of men, curse be they before Jehovah; for they have driven me from my kindred, and from my father's house, that I must be a vagabond and a fugitive upon the face of the earth. The foxes have caves, and the birds under the heavens have nests, but I have neither portion nor inheritance in Jacob. What have I done? Why shall my blood be made to flow before Jehovah: for the king of Israel is come out to pursue a child, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains of Judah!"

Saul was overwhelmed. He did not resent the sarcasm in David's speech. He felt its poignant truth.

"I have sinned," he replied humbly. "Forgive me, my son—forgive me, I pray you, this last time. I will no more seek your hurt, because my life was precious in your eyes again. I have played the fool. I have erred exceedingly."

David was touched.

"It is well," he answered, immediately appeased. "Behold your spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and fetch it. Jehovah will render to every man according to his righteousness; forasmuch as you were in my power today and I would not put forth my hand against Jehovah's anointed. And, behold, as your life was esteemed this day in mine eyes, so let my life be esteemed in the eyes of Jehovah, and let him deliver me out of all tribulations."

"So be it," Saul assented. "May you be blessed, my son David, for you shall both do mightily and shall prevail."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ACHISH SENDS GREETINGS

The renewed attempt on the part of the king to take his life filled David's soul with misgivings so profound and powerful that all his optimism failed to overcome them. Saul's affirmations were, no doubt, honestly meant at the time, but one could not

depend on what the king promised upon the impulse of the moment.

"I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul, if I stay in the land," David said to himself. "I must escape into another country."

But where should he go? Long and seriously he thought, but was not able to make up his mind. Insurmountable obstacles confronted him everywhere, and Samuel, who might have advised him, was dead. Then quite unexpectedly a retreat was offered him in the country where he least had looked for it.

Achish, the king of the Philistines, had gained the upperhand over the clique that clandestinely supported the kinsfolk of Goliath. He ruled supreme. No one durst gainsay his decrees. His lords vied with one another to give him honor.

Achish had closely followed the career of David. With great interest and sympathy he had observed the outlaw's growing popularity, as also Saul's diminishing influence and power. He thought to himself: "I must knit David to my cause. He is strong—he is influential. If he allied himself with me it would stabilize my throne— it would give me supremacy over Israel forever. Why not use the opportunity? Why not win him over to my side? He is still being persued. His life stands in daily peril in Israel. Why not invite him to come into the land of the Philistines? He has a force of seven hundred men, and his men are bold and courageous. That would strengthen my host considerably. When he first came to Gath he came empty-handed and the family of Goliath was still quite potent. But now David is chief of a mighty band, and my

own enemies and rivals have become few. I ought to give shelter to David."

And Achish carried out his resolution. One day a messenger came to David and brought congratulations from the king of the Philistines.

"My lord," said he, "sends greetings. He assures you of his love and esteem and deplores it that the king of Israel pursues such a faithful servant. As a token of his goodwill and friendship my lord offers to David the city of Ziklag as a retreat from the fury of his master. May it please David to accept the gift and seek refuge in the land of the Philistines."

David was deeply moved. Ziklag was a deserted city, which once had belonged to Judah. It lay about ten miles from Gath. After a few moments' reflection he decided to accept the courteous offer.

"What think you, my men?" he asked his band.

The outlaws one and all were ready to go to Philistia. The prospect of settling down and living again like honest men was too alluring.

"Good," David answered. Then turning to the waiting messenger, he said: "We accept the invitation. Tell your master that I shall never forget the kindness shown me in the hour of need."

Thus David marched to Ziklag. His men began at once to build new houses and to repair old ones. When a month had elapsed the place bore an entirely different aspect. David observed with satisfaction and joy the happiness of his followers. He thought already of sending an embassy to the king of Moab to fetch his parents, when the blue in the sky of his bliss grew suddenly overcast with clouds.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PAINFUL SITUATION

It was impossible for the Philistines and the Israelites to dwell in peace. The Philistines longed to revenge themselves. They beheld the growing disorder of the Israelites and believed the hour at hand when they could make good their defeats. They urged their king to summon the whole nation to war against Israel.

Achish was too eager himself for the fray to oppose the will of his people. Throughout the whole land he levied soldiers and collected funds to wage a war to the death. It stands to reason that under these conditions David felt ill at ease. The future again looked uncertain if not dangerous. He was enjoying the hospitality of the Philistines, but in his heart of hearts he remained an Israelite. He trembled for his brethren the Hebrews as he witnessed the colossal preparations of Achish. Would Saul be able to marshal an army sufficient to withstand the onslaught of the Philistine host?

One day a messenger came from Achish, who evidently reposed absolute confidence in David's devotedness to his new country. And why not? Was not Saul the enemy of David? Had not Saul chased him like a beast of the field and earnestly sought to take his life? Had not David found shelter and safety in the land of the Philistines? The heathen monarch thought it self-evident that the hunted Israelite should crave an opportunity to take his revenge.

So he asked him by the mouth of his servant to join the host in the fight against those who had exiled both him and his father's house.

The request did not come unexpectedly. David had often pondered the occurrence of such an eventuality. Notwithstanding, he had difficulty in hiding his emotion from Achish's messenger. To accept it was equal to moral suicide. He regretted deeply to have fled into the land of the Philistines. What business had he, a Hebrew, in the midst of a nation that was uncircumcised? He ought to have remained in Israel—he ought to have intrusted himself to the care of Jehovah who had so marvelously protected him in the past!

He was in a bad way. But there was no time for long deliberation. Achish, his benefactor, expected an answer. So he replied pleasantly, though his heart ached, as he intended to command his men to get ready at once for the war.

Achish was delighted. No sooner had he received the report of his messenger than he sent a second one to David and apprised him of the fact that he had made him chief of his body-guard.

That was a great honor, and every other man would have felt elated, but David almost broke down when he heard the news. His anxiety became well nigh insupportable. He fell on his knees and earnestly prayed to Jehovah that he would devise for him a way of escape.

He went about as in a dream. He observed that his commands were but sullenly obeyed. The thoughts and feelings of his men were akin to his own. Though banished from their country they loved to speak of it in their hours of leisure. To

unsheathe the sword against their own nation was perfectly loathsome to them. More than two-hundred of David's men had sent for their wives and other relations near and dear to them, but most of them had not yet called upon their families to follow them. The people they knew and loved still lived in the land of Israel. To wage war against them was an intolerable thought. David honored their feelings and forbore to show his authority. At last his band was ready. With a heavy heart he embraced Michal, whose eyes were moist, and departed.

CHAPTER XXX.

DELIVERED

In the the plain of Jezreel, in the neighborhood of Aphek, the Philistines gathered together all their hosts. The reason why the scene of battle was laid so far north, distant alike from the cities of the Philistines princes and the residence of Saul, was a strategical one. A great victory in Jezreel would cut the land virtually in two and give to Achish the key both to the south and to the north.

David was in the rearward with Achish, whilst the men of Philistia passed on by hundreds and thousands to take their respective positions. David's heart beat wildly. He racked his brain what to do. A thousand schemes had flitted through his troubled mind, but none had found his whole-hearted approval. He was in a painful

dilemma. If, when the armies engaged, he withdrew and quitted his post, he would fall under the the merited reproach, not only of cowardice and treachery, but of base ingratitude to the king, who had been his protector and friend, reposed a great confidence in him, and given him a very honorable commission. On the other hand, if he should, as was expected from him, fight for the Philistines against Israel, he would incur the imputation of being an enemy to his nation and a traitor to his country. He would make his own people hate him. He would give cause to the Hebrews to oppose his assumption of the crown, as unworthy the name of an Israelite, since he had fought against them under the banner of a heathen monarch. If Saul or Jonathan happened to be killed in this war, the fault would undoubtedly be laid at his door, as if he had slain them with his own hands.

Truly, David was in an unenviable position. He could not with honor desist from the battle, and he could not with honor engage in it. His soul was greatly distressed. He could not perceive how he might come off without guilt, or grief, or both.

Now whilst he was thus harrowing and vexing his soul for a solution, an unexpected door of deliverance was thrown open before him. The nobles and princes of the Philistines began to regard David with undisguised suspicion and malice. Before long they murmured and expostulated with Achish.

"What do these Hebrews here?" they demanded surlily. "Can we put confidence in them? Can we at all trust them? A Hebrew in our camp is out of his place!"

Achish was piqued. It angered him that his inferiors questioned his judgment.

"Is not this David, the apostate servant of Saul?" he rejoined sharply. "Has he not been with me two full months and I have found no fault in him during all these days?"

But the Philistine princes remonstrated.

"Make the men return," they said threateningly. "They have been with us too long already. Believe it, O king, they will prove thorns in our sides in the contest. If we take them along to battle they will all become our adversaries: for wherewith should these fellows reconcile themselves to their lords? would it not be with the heads of our men? Have you forgotten that it was David whom the women of Israel praised in their songs? If the king were wise he would command us to cut off the heads of all these men!"

Achish's chagrin was great. He had thought himself supreme and now he encountered such opposition. Then his enemies were still numerous and strong! "Confound it!" he fumed to himself—"confound it, that it is before the battle. I need every man. I must yield, I must yield. But I do it reluctantly." Still he tried his best. He vouched for the faithfulness of David and his men. In vain. His princes became obstreperous. Achish barely accomplished to save David and his men from full assassination. His mortification was great. Calling David to his tent, he told him how matters stood.

"As Jehovah lives," he declared with fervor, "you have been upright, and your going out and your coming in has been good in my sight; for I have

not found evil in you since the day of your coming to me unto this hour; but the lords favor you not. You must leave me; you must return; for your life is in danger and the life of your men."

"But what have I done?" David asked with simulated indignation. "Why may I not fight in the armies of my lord the king?"

"You have done nothing amiss," Achish replied quickly. "No one can lay a thing to your charge. But the princes hate you. They are evilly disposed to you. Therefore you must rise up early in the morning with your band and depart, for, as Jehovah lives, I shall not be able to save you from harm."

At these words David bowed himself to the earth and left the king's tent. The next morning he and his men set out to return to Ziklag. As for the Philistines, they immediately proceeded farther north and pitched their tents in the village of Shunnen at the foot of the Little Hermon that rises at the northern side of the valley of Jezreel.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RAIDING OF ZIKLAG

In the meantime David's band marched joyfully home. They were as happy and frolicsome as little children. Psalm after psalm rolled loudly over the plains through which they passed. Shout after shout went up into the air and re-echoed from hill to hill. Their hearts overflowed with delight at the happy turn things had taken. Instead of staining

their hands with the blood of their countrymen they could go home to embrace their women and children.

A distance of about fifty-five miles had to be covered. On the morning of the third day the band reached an elevation from which their town could be descried. They looked toward the site, and consternation seized them. What was that? Where formerly hundreds and hundreds of houses had stood there were now but broken walls, blackened ruins, heaps of smoking debris! With filmy eyes they started at the dismal scene. Their faces grew wan and haggard. Hoarsely they asked one another as to the meaning of it all. Slowly they began to understand. Their city had been raided in their absence!

Now a howl of despair—more beastly than human—rose to the sky. Spurred by despair the band raced like a whirlwind to where Ziklag had stood. Not a house had been spared. Every dwelling place had been consigned to the flames. Round about there reigned the desolation of silence and destruction.

"Where is my wife?" a voice rang forth. "Sarah, O Sarah!"

She was gone!

"My children, O my children!" another voice cried.

They were also gone! Not a sign of life was to be detected anywhere. Women and children, oxen and sheep, everything—everything—everything had been carried off by the robbers. When the full, terrible truth was understood by David's men, they were overwhelmed with grief. In utter despair they cowered on the smoking remains of their

houses, strewed ashes on their hair, clipped their beards, rent their garments, and moaned piteously.

But gradually their feelings changed. More than one evil eye was turned upon David. Here and there a man began to utter imprecations. Was not David alone the cause of this calamity? What business had he to order them to join the army of the uncircumcised Philistines? They had gained nothing at Aphek and lost everything at Ziklag. He knew from a former experience that the Philistine nobles favored him not. This he ought to have mentioned to Achish. Then all would have been well. They would never have been asked to take part in the war.

In various place knots of men gathered. Their looks waxed more menacing from minute to minute. Presently their mutterings grew loud and distinct.

"Villain!" some one shouted suddenly, and "Villain!" a chorus of voices repeated. "Villain, bloodhound, give us back our wives—give us back our children—give us back our houses!"

Pale as death, their swords drawn, Abishai and Ahimelech came up to protect their chief, who, at this moment, endured the keenest pain in his life so full of grief. David felt altogether wretched and woeful. The land of his nativity had spewed him out; the lords of the land of his adoption had spurned him his wife had been stolen and his own men called him names. Was it possible to imagine a more miserable position? A great bitterness inundated his soul. Had God spared him for this? Anointed him for this? A groan of dismay escaped from his lips.

Presently he rallied himself. A stone had been

thrown at him! The missile had almost struck his head. Indeed, it had grazed his hair. Had it come to that already? He rose erect. He extended his hand. His eyes flashed and his lips thundered:

"Disgrace and shame on the heads of those who sow the seeds of dissension! Quit yourselves like men! This is no time for shedding of tears, for wailing and mourning. This is a time for immediate action. Behold the ruins! They are still burning. The raiders, therefore, cannot be far away. To all appearance they sacked our town but yesterday. To your arms, my men, we must overtake the marauders! If Jehovah be gracious we shall yet recover all!"

David had spoken the proper words. Sheepishly the men dropped their stones and those who had been foremost in shouting denunciations slunk away abashed and filled with apprehensions.

The pursuit was forthwith undertaken. So rapidly did David march that when he reached the brook Besor, which flows into the sea to the south of Gaza, two hundred could go no farther from sheer exhaustion. As David did not wish to lose any time he commanded them to rest where they were and to await his return and in the meantime to guard the baggage of their comrades. With his remaining five-hundred men he forded the brook and continued the chase.

Ever and anon the pursuers found traces of the robbers: remnants of food, some broken weapons, a garment or cooking-utensils. In the afternoon they found in the field a man stripped of his clothing, and in a state of unconsciousness. The person was

brought to David who commanded that attempts be made to restore him to his senses.

"Give him some wine," he said to Abishai.

It was done. After a little while the man opened his eyes, gazed about unintelligently, and seemed to swoon away again.

"Give him some more wine," David directed.

The man now drank freely, roused himself and looked at his saviors with curious eyes.

"Who are you, and whence do you come?" David inquired.

"I am an Egyptian," the captive replied with feeble voice. "I was servant to an Amelckite; yesterday my master left because three days ago I fell sick and there seemed no hope of recovery." He stopped exhaustedly.

"Give him something to eat!" David commanded. "You see he is famished."

The Egyptian thanked David with a warm look, took the food and the wine that was proffered him and ate and drank.

"Now proceed," David interrupted his eating when he thought that the captive had sufficiently strengthened himself. "Can you tell me whether or not the Amelekites pillaged and burned up Ziklag yesterday?"

"They have," the man nodded. "We made a raid upon the South of the Cherethites, and upon that which belongs to Judah, and upon the South of Caleb; thereupon we plundered Ziklag and burned it with fire."

David trembled with excitement.

"And can you tell me which way the Amelekites have fled?" he asked.

"I can."

"Will you bring us down to their camp?"

The Egyptian looked David full in the face.

"Swear to me by your God," he said, "that you will neither kill me, nor deliver me up into the hands of my master, and I will show you the camp of this troop."

David lifted up his oath-hand.

"I swear it by Jehovah!" he exclaimed.

"It is well," the captive agreed. "Now command two men to assist me, for I am still weak."

The pursuit was taken up again. Two Israelites supported the captive who proved to be a reliable guide, for towards evening the camp of the Amelekites was seen in the distance. They were spread abroad over a fruitful plain. Since they deemed themselves absolutely secure, they were eating, and drinking, and dancing. No watch had been set; no weapon was in any man's hand; no danger was apprehended. Great flocks of cattle—the booty of their raids—were peacefully grazing in various places. When David's men perceived the robbers they quivered with impatience to take their revenge.

With circumspection and wisdom David gave his orders. He divided his little force into four bands of equal size. Then he completely surrounded the camp of the foe. At a preconcerted signal the infuriated Hebrews descended on those who could neither resist nor flee. Deep into the night the carnage lasted. Only about two hundred servants who had charge of the camels escaped. All the other marauders fell under the strokes of the wrathful assailants. Everything that had been taken by the Amelekites was recovered. The women and the

children were found safe and unhurt. At this the joy of the Hebrews was complete. Husbands and wives embraced each other, whilst their little ones clug to their garments and wept.

"Michal, my own Michal!" David cried when he clasped his wife to his bosom.

"David, my own David," Michal murmured, as she laid her head on his breast.

The next morning the victorious band returned to rejoin their comrades, who had stayed by the brook Besor to watch over the baggage. From afar they shouted the good news. Somewhat abashed at their weakness the two hundred Hebrews went forth to salute their brethren. There were many who received them with open arms, but there were many, too, who scowled and frowned. An immense amount of booty had been taken. Those who were covetous already revolved in their minds how it was to be divided.

"Shall the shirkers and lingerers share with us in the spoil we took?" they muttered. "Nay, they went not with us to the battle, so we shall not give them aught of what we gained or what we recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that he may lead them away, and depart."

These sentiments were expressed quite audibly. David noticed the greed of his men and his wrath was aroused.

"You think evil in your hearts, and frame mischief with your lips," he cried. "What we have gained in this conflict, we have gained by the help of Jehovah. He alone delivered the Amelekites into our hand. As each man's share is that went down

into the battle, so shall his share be that has tarried by the baggage: they shall share alike!"

These plain words quickly silenced the grumblers. Those who had been most vociferous in voicing their dissatisfaction, instantly put on an innocent face. The spoil was equally divided and David led his band back to Ziklag to see what could be done with the houses that had been destroyed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

EN-DOR

The two armies stood confronting each other in the valley of Jezreel, the Philistines occupying the northern side of the plain, near Shunem, and the troops of Saul encamping on the southern side, upon the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa. Between them stretched an immense plain.

Saul had, for several days, been watching the swelling hosts of the enemy. He clearly perceived that the Philistines were leading against him the most formidable army that had ever been marshalled in his days. Evidently, it was no ordinary battle that was to be fought; it was one that would decide the fate of the country. He, too, had gathered all Israel together. His force was larger in numbers than any he had ever commanded before. Yet his heart failed him in view of the colossal Philistine host. The sight of their camp filled him with dismal forebodings, for its extent greatly surpassed that of the tribes of Israel.

It was historic ground on which the two armies lay encamped. Here Barak, with his hastily raised army, had inflicted defeat on the Canaanites. In this very plain the hosts of Midian lay encamped when Gideon discomfited them. Might not another victory be in store for God's people?

God's people! Saul felt uneasy at the thought. He had tried to get into communication with God—he had used every authorized means he could think of for getting guidance from above, but Jehovah had not responded. He had answered neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by the prophets which he had interrogated. He was condemned—he knew it, felt it, realized it, and the realization of it filled his heart with fear. What would happen on the morrow? Would Israel triumph? would Israel succumb? To this question he *must* have an answer. To this query he *must* have a reply. But who could reveal to him the future? Who could disclose to him the events that were to be?

"Samuel!" it flashed through his mind. In the dread gloom that enveloped his outlook the king thought of the Seer he had scorned when alive. He craved the old man's presence and counsel—he craved his guidance and advice. He recognized in Samuel the messenger of Jehovah, the representative of the Lord of hosts. He must have an interview with him—he must see his face or at least hear his voice. God did not answer by the priests that were living; let him vouchsafe an answer, then, by the prophet who was dead.

Saul's features waxed stern and rigid. In the days of his success he had been zealous in the extermination of wizards and necromancers—persons

who pretend to know the secrets of the future--persons who declared that they had access to the inhabitants of the unseen world. In those days he little thought that a time would come when he would rejoice to learn that one poor wretch had escaped the vigilance of his officers, and still carried on, or pretended to carry on, a nefarious trafic with the realms of the departed.

"Doeg," he asked his armor-bearer, "is there anywhere in Israel a woman left who is possessed of a familiar spirit?"

The Edomite pricked up his ears. He remembered his master's aversion to sorcerers and witches, and his ruthless destruction of all who plied their trade.

"You need not have any apprehensions," Saul continued; "I do not wish to harm her, if there be such a woman left. I want to consult her."

Doeg's surprise was great. Yes, there was such a woman left. He had more than once inquired of her. She lived in a cave at En-Dor, a place but ten miles distant from where Saul encamped.

"My lord," he said, "one woman has escaped the sword of your men. She lives not far from here--about ten miles, and if it please my lord the king, I shall conduct him to her abode."

"It is well," Saul answered gloomily. "We shall go when the host is asleep. No one shall know of it--least of all Jonathan."

When night covered the earth with her mantle of darkness, Doeg and Saul stealthily left the camp. The king had disguised himself as a common soldier. To get to En-Dor the two men had to creep around the back of the position of the Philistines, who lay

entrenched on the front slope of Hermon. It was a weary journey. Hardly a word was spoken on the way, as the king was absorbed in his thoughts. The night was dim, but not dark; no moon shone, but the stars, though multitudinous, gleamed pale, as from the farthest depths of the heaven; clouds gray and fleecy rolled slowly across the sky, veiling and disclosing, by turns, the melancholy orbs.

After the lapse of three hours Doeg led his master to a cave hidden amidst brushwood and trees near the village of En-Dor. With the hilt of his sword he three times pounded upon the door that barred the entrance. A shuffling noise was heard inside. A bolt was withdrawn, the door opened, and, in the flickering light of a torch the king beheld an ugly woman, already stricken in years, who stared at him with bleared and rheumy eyes. She recognized Doeg but looked dubiously at the king.

"Be at ease," Doeg assured her. "There is no danger. Let us enter."

The witch stepped aside and the two men entered. In the middle of the cave, to the right, Saul perceived a shabby divan. At the left a table had been placed on which lay the remnants of a meal. In the rear a woodfire was burning. Behind it gaped the mouth of a dark hole that had been dug into the ground.

"What do you want?" the woman asked, fixing her eyes on the king.

Saul gazed on the hideous form before him and shuddered. Notwithstanding, so low had he fallen that instead of scorn he had but a feeling of superstitious awe.

"I have come," he said, "to ask you to bring up from the region of death whomsoever I name you."

The witch shook her head disapprovingly.

"You know," she replied, "what Saul has done. You know that he has cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land; wherefore then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

Saul's eye quailed before the look of the witch. He realized how deeply he had fallen. But there was no going back now. He rose erect and threw the woman his purse, heavy with gold.

"There!" he cried impatiently. "Take that! And, as Jehovah lives, there shall no punishment happen to you for this thing!"

The woman's eyes sparkled with avarice. She picked up the purse, examined it and hid it in the folds of her garment.

"Very well," she answered more friendly. "Whom shall I bring up for you?"

"Bring me up Samuel," the king replied curtly.

"Samuel?"

Amazement not unmixed with terror appeared in the face of the soothsayer. Involuntarily she recoiled a few steps.

"Yes," the king insisted. "I want Samuel."

The woman's tension remained unrelieved. She stood rigid as a statue. Evidently she was afraid to try her tricks on Israel's great prophet.

"Be about your business," Saul's voice commanded her. "Or have you no power over the great?"

The witch frowned. Slowly she walked to the fire in the rear. She stirred it into a blaze, made

mysterious passes over it, and mumbled and chanted with hollow, interior voice, unintelligent incantations. Her body moved backward and forward, to the left and to the right. Little by little her chants and conjurations became more earnest and importunate. She seemed to grow unconscious of the presence of the two men, and her eye, fixed and rigid, was as that of one in a trance.

Suddenly she shrieked with terror, and fell back. A fearful trembling seized her whole body. Her hands extended as if endeavoring to ward off some terrible apparition.

"What is it?" the king whispered.

Saul's voice called the woman back to her senses.

"Why have you deceived me?" she groaned, still stretching forth her right hand, and, with her left, covering her face. "I know you! You are the king!"

"Calm yourself," Saul replied with a thick voice. "Only tell me what you have seen."

The woman withdrew from the fire—slowly, tremblingly.

"There he is!" she exclaimed. "Behold a god ascends out of the deep."

"What form is he of?" the king asked through chattering teeth.

"He is an old man," the woman answered. "He is covered with a mantle."

And now Saul himself perceived in the smoke the vague outlines of a human form—vast and imposing. Yet so indefinite was the outline to his eye, which was covered with a film from gazing on it steadily, he knew not whether it was a phantom or

a vapor that he beheld. Now the figure spoke—and its voice was hollow and unearthly.

"Why hast thou disquieted me?" it demanded. "Why hast thou brought me up?"

Saul recognized the prophet. His knees gave way, and he fell heavily on the earth.

"I am sore distressed," he murmured. "The Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams, nor by Urim; therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

A momentary silence ensued. Then Samuel responded.

"Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing that Jehovah is departed from thee and become thine adversary? Dost thou seek to scale the heavens through the mysteries of hell? Behold, Jehovah hath done unto thee, as he spake by me: he hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and hath given it to thy neighbor, even unto David. Because of all thy disobedience and crimes hath Jehovah done this thing unto thee this day.—Mark it well: Israel shall be delivered into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me in the world of shadows."

At this dire news the king's entire strength gave way. He lay on the ground as one dead. He had not expected that the interview with Samuel would be a pleasant one, but he had not imagined that the prophet would announce such an awful doom. Samuel's words had been like thunderbolts. One by one, each stroke heavier than the other, they had pitilessly fallen on his head. The burden was

greater than he could bear. Weary and faint from want of food, smitten to the heart with awe and terror, he succumbed under the judgment. He hoped that death would overtake him on the spot.

But nay—he was to lead the host of Israel to defeat and shame! A hand touched his shoulder. When he looked up the face of the sorceress bent itself over him.

“My lord,” she said, “my lord; pray, rise from the earth. Rest thyself upon the couch.”

Saul stared at the woman with troubled mien.

“My lord,” the witch resumed, “behold, thy handmaid hath hearkened unto thy voice, and I have put my life in my hand, and have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me. Now therefore, I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thy handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee; and eat, that thou mayest have strength, when thou goest on thy way.”

Saul did not move. It was a question whether he had understood. Then Doeg came to the aid of the woman.

“My lord,” he admonished, “heed her advice, that your soul faint not.”

Then Saul rose listlessly from the earth and flung himself upon the couch. The woman quickly prepared a meal and placed it before her guests. Doeg ate greedily, but Saul took only a mouthful.

A little later the two men retraced their way southward to the heights of Gilboa. It was early morning when they arrived in their camp—the morning of a day charged with doom.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BATTLE

Shortly after Saul's arrival in his camp, the Philistines began to stir. The Israelites also became active. Saul arranged his troops on the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa. Jonathan and Abner were his chief generals. They commanded the right and left wing respectively. The king himself occupied the center of the host, and with him were his two sons Abinadab and Malchishua. Doeg served as his armor-bearer.

The position of the Israelites was excellent for fighting, but unfavorable for a retreat.

With grim face Saul observed the enemy to move southward across the plain. He gave command for the fighting to begin. The host descended into the plain and the tug of war commenced.

Saul knew that David had escaped into the land of the Philistines. He wondered very much whether he would fight to-day in the ranks of the uncircumcised. Doeg believed it and gnashed his teeth.

Hither and thither the battle swayed. The king was in the thickest of the fight. He fought as though he had a hundred lives to lose. It was a foregone conclusion with him that Israel would suffer defeat, for he had no reason to doubt the words of the prophet. But he would, at least, die a valorous death.

Till midday the struggle lasted without either side

being able to boast any advantage. The armies seemed to be equal in power and courage. But in the afternoon there was a change. Slowly but steadily Israel fell back from the valley of Jezreel upon Mount Gilboa. Saul observed it with fear and distress.

The carnage became fiercer and fiercer. The Philistines, hopeful of victory, redoubled their onslaughts. Blood flowed in streams. The losses on the part of the Israelites became appalling. Intelligence was brought to the king that Jonathan had fallen. It was a terrific blow, for in his heart of hearts he had loved his son. Scarcely had he received the report, when Malchishua, who stood nearby, uttered a gurgling cry. The arrow of an archer had transfixed his throat. A few minutes later the prince was a corpse.

Saul's rage grew in volume and vehemence. He thirsted for revenge. Like a god he pushed forward. His sword clove a way through the rampart of shields. His example put spirit in the men about him. Man after man the king hewed down. The Philistines recoiled in awe before his stature and strength and the fierce determination that burned in his eye. Already the space became cleared of the foe, when strong re-enforcements came up. And now all valor seemed in vain. Saul's companions yielded, fatigued and dismayed. Abinadab, who had stayed close to his father's side, fell mortally wounded. The air literally darkened with the flights of arrows and spears. The archers of the Philistines had the advantage. They did deadly execution. Shouting for joy at the evident progress, they pressed onward with irresistible strength.

Israel retreated. Here and there the lines began to break up. In various places groups sought safety in flight. By and by the rout became general and irretrievable. Saul made several frantic attempts to rally the disintegrating host, but the blasts of his trumpet died away unheeded. Panic and consternation had seized upon his men. The king realized that further fight was useless.

"All is lost!" he cried. "Come, my men, let us flee!"

But it was too late already. A company of Philistine sharpshooters closed in upon them before they reached the main body of the host. One after another of Saul's companions sank beneath the volleys of arrows and darts. As by a miracle Saul and Doeg alone escaped. They succeeded in eluding their pursuers by seeking refuge in a narrow pass. The king's face was covered with gore. A missile had scraped his head.

Both men gasped for breath as they leaned against the rocky walls of the pass. Utter despair glowed in the eyes of the king. He rested himself on his sword.

"Doeg," he said hoarsely. "Doeg!"

"My lord," the Edomite replied, still panting for air.

"Doeg," Saul repeated, "all is lost. Do you hear, man? All!"

Doeg cowered under the stare of his royal master. He found no words to respond.

"Samuel spoke the truth," the king resumed, whilst a tremor shook his might frame. "Israel is discomfited, my sons are dead, and I, too, shall be slain. But nay," he roused himself, and a wild fire

leaped into his eyes, "nay, I will not be slain by the uncircumcised. If I am to die, I will at least die like a king. Doeg, draw upon me!"

Saul tore away the armor that shielded his breast and confronted his servant.

"There, Doeg, thrust me through at one stroke!"

The Edomite shrank back with horror.

"My lord!" he gasped.

Saul frowned upon him.

"You wince?" he taunted. "Since when have you such a tender conscience? Have you not slain fourscore and five priests that wore the ephod? Do not hesitate, therefore, to plunge your sword into my heart. Be quick," he added, turning pale, "for they are coming! Quick, I command you!"

But the Edomite drew back. His whole frame quaked convulsively. He did not find it in his heart to kill his lord.

"Doeg," the king moaned, stretching forth his hands pleadingly, "I beseech you, let me not fall into their power! Shall they make sport of me? Shall they force me to carry the heads of my sons in procession through their cities? Shall they pin me to the ground by stakes? Shall they flay me alive? Shall they cut off my nose and ears and stab out my eyes? Doeg!"

But the Edomite had slunk away to a great distance. The words of his master had but increased his horror. He neither came back nor replied to the entreaties of Saul.

Then the king laughed a wild laugh.

"Coward!" he cried. "My curse on your head!"

Then he reached for his sword, planted it on the

ground, directed its point to his heart, and violently threw himself upon it.

A groan escaped his lips. Then all was still. The king was dead.

Doeg, involuntarily, drew nearer. His hair stood on end. His eyes became glazed as he gazed on the still twitching form of his master. Was he afraid to do what Saul had done? There was no time to be lost if the enemy was to be foiled, for only a furlong away they were already clambering over the rocks. But one moment Doeg hesitated—but one brief moment, then he, too, planted his sword upon the ground, reversed, and dashed himself upon it.

The darkness stayed further deeds of blood. Israel had been completely defeated. North of the valley of Jezreel, and even across the Jordan, which flows close by, the people deserted the cities and fled into the open country. Meantime the victors entered the strongholds everywhere and enriched themselves with the spoil.

When the bodies of the slain had been searched and stripped, Saul and his sons were discovered. At this the Philistines rejoiced greatly. They would have preferred to have captured the king alive. Notwithstanding, even as it was they had cause to feel satisfied. Without much ceremony they struck off the heads of Saul and his sons, and despoiled their bodies of their costly armor. These they sent round through Philistia, in order that the happy news might be published in the houses of their idols, and in every town and city of their people. As for the headless trunks of the king and the princes, they were carried to Bethshan, a

mountain fortress, which, from the top of a steep brow, commanded the Jordan valley, and there in chains suspended from the walls of the city to be devoured by the birds in the air.

The sun once more disappeared in the west. The royal corpses swung idly in the breeze. Above them circled ravenous vultures, eager to gnaw them to the bones. Shall eagles and hawks complete the work which cruel men have begun?

Across the Jordan, scarcely three miles removed from Bethshan, lay Jabesh-Gilead—a city which Saul, at the beginning of his reign, had delivered out of the hands of Nahash the Ammonite. The Gileadites had heard of Saul's death and learned what the Philistines had done to his body and to the bodies of his sons. They were deeply moved. Ever since the king had saved them, they had nourished in their breasts a sense of gratitude. Now they had an opportunity to repay in some measure the debt they owed him. A valorous band resolved to rescue the corpses from shame and disgrace. Under cover of the night they forded the river, climbed the steep brow of the hill, cautiously detached the bodies from the wall, and reverently carried them away.

It was morning when they were back in Jabesh-Gilead. In the presence of a large concourse of people they burned the mangled remains sufficiently to destroy all traces of insult, and then deposited the ashes under a great tamarisk tree. Thereupon they fasted seven days in token of their deep sorrow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DAVID'S DISTRESS

In Ziklag David was anxiously waiting for news from the war. His men were engaged in clearing away the debris of the city. But their hearts were not in the work. They could not but think of the battle that was to be fought in the valley of Jezreel. What would be the issue of the conflict? Which army would conquer? If the Israelites should be defeated, what would be the fate of Saul and Jonathan? What would be their own fate? Was it worth while to rebuilt Ziklag? Was it not parlous to remain in Philistia?

On the morning of the third day their suspense came to an end. A messenger arrived from the theatre of war. He was a young man. His very appearance betokened disaster and mourning, for his garments were rent, his hair was dishevelled and covered with earth.

"From whence do you come?" David asked him.

"I am escaped from the camp of Israel," the man answered.

"Tell me how the battle went," David urged.

"Alas," the youth exclaimed, "I bring woeful tidings. Our army has been discomfited, and many of the people are fallen and dead."

"How fares Saul—how fares Jonathan?" David asked with quavering lips.

"Saul and all the princes are dead."

"Do you speak the truth?"

"I speak the truth."

David was overwhelmed: He trembled visibly. He staggered and would have fallen, had not Abishai come to his support.

"How do you know that Saul is dead—that Jonathan is slain?" he asked with hollow voice. "Can it not be that you are mistaken?"

"No, my lord. They are dead. They are most assuredly dead, for I saw their corpses with these mine eyes."

"How did it happen?"

"Aye, my lord, it was by chance that I happened upon the king when the host was routed. He was mortally wounded and leaned upon his spear. The chariots and horsemen of the Philistines were hard upon his heels. He saw me and called me to his side. I came and he asked me who I was. When I had told him that I was an Amalekite, he charged me to draw my sword and to slay him, since anguish had taken hold of his soul. Since I was persuaded that he could never make his escape, wounded as he was, I drew and slew him that he died. Behold here the crown of the king and the bracelets of Jonathan, who lay close by. I took them and brought them hither unto my lord."

When David saw the crown of Saul and the ornaments of Jonathan, he groaned aloud. Overcome with sorrow he took hold of his garments and tore them to shreds. His men did likewise. The young Amalekite was dumbfounded with astonishment and apprehension. He had been cocksure that his report would be like music to the ears of the outlaw chief, who, he thought, would rejoice at the news that his remorseless enemy was dead. Such things

were so common, so universal in the East. For helping to kill a rival, and to open the way to a throne, more than one man had received cordial thanks and ample gifts from potentates around. Here it seemed to be different. Somewhat disconcerted he scrutinized the behavior of David and his followers.

As for his story, it was correct in so far as he had found the bodies of both Saul and Jonathan. Of the death of the two young princes he knew only from hearsay. The crown and the bracelets he had stowed away between his accoutrements. Managing to escape, and considering what he would do with the articles, he decided to take them to David. To ingratiate himself still more with the outlaw chief, who, as rumor had it, would most assuredly become king, he had invented the story narrated above. Misgivings he had none. He firmly believed that David would reward him richly for the deed. Now it began to dawn upon him that he might have reckoned without his host.

"Who do you say that you are?" David asked. The tone of his voice was disquieting.

"I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite," he replied abashed.

"An Amalekite," David ejaculated. "And you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy Jehovah's anointed?"

The messenger winced. The next moment he fell on his knees and lifted up his hands imploringly.

"Mercy!" he cried.

But David turned fiercely upon his men.

"Go near," he charged them. "Fall upon him!"

"My lord, my lord," the Amalekite exclaimed. "Have patience! I have not told the truth!"

But David made an impatient gesture. He pointed to the ornaments of Jonathan and to the royal crown.

"Villain!" he said. "These things are witnesses against you."

"But my lord—"

"Slay him!" David thundered. "His blood be upon his own head, for his mouth has testified against himself, saying: 'I have killed Jehovah's anointed!'"

Until evening David sat upon the ground, his clothes being rent, and his hair being covered with ashes and earth, and lamented over Saul and Jonathan. In broken accents of grief he mourned the death of the king and the death of his friend:

"How are the mighty fallen—Ah, tell it not in Gath—Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon the high places!—Publish it not in Ashkelon: lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.—Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain upon you, neither fields of offering: for there the shields of the mighty were broken.—Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul!—How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!—O Jonathan! I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was exceedingly wonderful!—Ah, how are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

KING OF JUDAH

"David," Michal said on the morrow to her husband, "let us return into the land of Israel."

David drew her to his breast and kissed her eyes.

"So be it," he agreed. "I have thought of it all night. We shall this very day set out for Hebron, lest the Philistines return and slay us all."

The city of Hebron lay about eighteen miles to the south of Jerusalem. It was a place abounding in venerable and ancient associations. Here Abraham had often pitched his camp under its spreading oaks, and among its olive groves and vine-clad hills Isaak, another patriarch, had meditated at eventide. Here Sarah lay buried in the sepulchre of Machpelah, which Abraham had obtained from the sons of Heth. Here Joseph and his brethren had brought up the body of Jacob, and according to his dying command, laid it beside the bones of Leah his wife. It had afforded shelter to the twelve spies when they went up to search the land; and the cluster of grapes which they carried back was cut from the vines of the neighboring valley. Here Caleb had lived, one of the noblest spirits of the nation, and afterwards it had been made one of the Levitical cities of refuge.

When David came to Hebron, its inhabitants received him with joy.

"Now our deliverer has come!" they shouted. "Now all is well!"

From Hebron the news of David's arrival spread throughout the whole tribe of Judah. Enthusiasm ran high. Priests and prophets congregated in great numbers, and scores of districts sent representatives and delegates to honor the outlaw chief and to implore his assistance. Before a week had passed, a formal assembly was called in which David was chosen king of the tribe and publicly anointed to wield the sceptre.

Judah was the principal tribe of the twelve. It was confidently expected that the other tribes would forthwith fall in line. This hope, however, did not materialize.

Immediately after the defeat of the army Abner, captain of Saul's host, had repaired to Gibeah and from thence fetched Ishbosheth. He brought him over to Mahanaim, in the half-tribe of Manasseh, on the east side of the Jordan, and made him king over all Israel. Ishbosheth, of course, was but a tool in Abner's hands. Notwithstanding, all the tribes of Israel, with the exception of Judah, acknowledged the rule of the weak-minded prince, and paid him homage. Mahanaim was well chosen, not only from the historical associations of the spot, where angel hosts had met Jacob on his return to the land of promise, but also because it was sufficiently far from the scene of the recent war to afford safe shelter and time for recuperation.

Dreary days and months followed. David thought of the oaths sworn to Saul and Jonathan. He was loath to fight the rival king, though many men of Judah demanded it. Abner misconstrued the patience of David as cowardice. He grew prouder every day. He raised an immense army

and assumed a very menacing position. The force of circumstances compelled David to meet Abner in battle and contend for his right. The conflict took place in the valley of Gideon. The seasoned troops of the king of Judah obtained the victory over the forces of Ishbosheth. Abner lost his life somewhat later at the hands of an assassin, and David's supremacy became an established fact.

Ishbosheth trembled for his life. The thought of David's vengeance disturbed what remained of sanity in his mind. Day and night he expected the sudden appearance of the king in Mahanaim to execute his wrath. But David did not come. He kept the oath sworn to Saul. Instead of showing his malice to the house of Saul, he showed himself friendly to all his kindred and friends. When he heard what the men of Jabesh-Gilead had done, he was touched to tears. He at once dismissed a messenger to them and had him say:

"Blessed be ye of Jehovah, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even to Saul, and have buried him. And now Jehovah show lovingkindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite your kindness, because you have done this thing."

This message astonished not a few. Many had expected that David would punish all those who had served with Saul. They saw to their amazement that he showed them favor.

Still there remained people a plenty who judged the young ruler by the corruptness of their own heart, as will immediately appear. Two captains of Ishbosheth's army resolved to murder their master. They thought their act would please the king of Judah, since it ridded him of a rival. Ishbo-

sheth was accustomed to take a mid-day sleep. Of this the two assassins took advantage. On pretense of superintending the receipt of what was necessary for the provisioning of their men, they entered the royal residence at the time when their master was taking his customary nap, made their way into his bed-chamber, stabbed him in the abdomen, cut off his head, and, with the gory trophy wrapped in a cloth, set out for Hebron to present it to David.

"Behold, the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, thine enemy, who sought thy life;" they said to the king when they were shown into his presence. "Jehovah has avenged you this day both of Saul and his seed."

David was struck speechless with terror. Did men thus take his character still? Had he not time and again made it plain that he would never touch Saul harmfully?

"As Jehovah lives, who has redeemed my soul out of all adversity," he thundered, "when one told me, saying, 'I have slain Saul,' thinking to have brought good tidings, I took him and slew him in Ziklag;—yea, this was the reward I gave him for his deed. How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed, shall I not now require his blood of their hands and take them away from the earth?"

The shameless murderers trembled at these words. They threw themselves on their faces and moaned for mercy. But David turned away in disgust.

"Lead them forth," he commanded his soldiers. "Slay them and hang them up the beside the pool of Hebron, that all the world may see that I am innocent of Ishbosheth's death."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

KING OF THE NATION

Through the death of Saul's son the rivalry for the crown had come to an end. All tribes henceforth paid homage to David. From near and far presents were brought and congratulations were sent. For the present the king remained in Hebron. Thither he invited the queen and all that still remained of Saul's seed. Also his parents returned from the land of the Moabites. Happiness and bliss filled David's heart. His trials were at an end. Jehovah had delivered him from all his adversaries.

Only one thing remained to vex his soul. Zion was still in the hands of Gentiles. The Jebusites dwelt there and disgraced the land. He concluded to oust them from their stronghold. When Zion once more belonged to Israel he would within its walls build a temple unto Jehovah, and in that temple bestow the ark of the covenant, which for many years had been relegated to oblivion.

The ark of the covenant was an oblong box of acacia-wood, two and one-half cubits long, overlaid with gold. Covering its lid, there was a solid gold plate, called the mercy seat, with two cherubim of gold at each end. It contained the two tables of stone on which were engraved the words of the Law. It led the way through the wilderness, at the crossing of the Jordan, and in the march around the walls of Jericho. Joshua took it to Gilgal and

finally to Shiloh, where it was in the time of Samuel. It was captured in battle by the Philistines, who were, however, forced to return it, since Jehovah visited them with various plagues. Since the return from Philistia it had been stored away in Kirjath-jearim, in the house of one Abinadab.

David was not the man to put off a thing after once his mind was made up. Shortly after the death of Ishbosheth he led a strong army against Zion. But such was its natural and artificial strength, that the Jebusites, when they observed the Hebrews, laughed them to scorn.

"Our blind and our lame shall drive them away!" they said.

But soon they found out their mistake. David inflicted upon them a crushing defeat. The city was taken after a comparatively short siege.

The king did not return to Hebron. Zion was almost marked out by nature to be Israel's capital, from its strength, central position, and its situation between Benjamin and Judah. Far more than this, it was the city of which the Lord, from the very beginning, had made choice for the sanctuary of his people. Accordingly, David, henceforth, made it his residence and ordered a palace built for the royal household, planning, at the same time, the erection of a temple for the God of Israel. But the latter undertaking would consume time. In order to make it possible for the faithful to attend the services of the Most High, he commanded that a tabernacle be constructed in which the priests might discharge their holy functions. When the tabernacle stood there in all its beauty, David thought it time to remove the ark from Kirjath-jearim.

But an undertaking of such solemn national importance as the transference of the ark to Zion must be participated in by the whole people, wherefore David made known his intention far and wide. In consequence representatives from every tribe assembled in Zion to the number of thirty thousand. These went in joyful procession to fetch the precious treasure.

It was a great event when the ark entered Zion. The people danced in joyful dances, to the music of cymbals and harps, castanets and flutes. Men and women wept for joy. But the climax came when the Levites carried the ark into the sanctuary. David had composed a psalm of praise for the glad occasion. A mammoth choir had rehearsed the wonderful composition for more than a month. And now, when the doors of the tabernacle swung open to admit the ark of the covenant, their voices pealed forth like mighty waters. With rapture and awe the worshippers listened to the wonderful hymn that closed with the words:

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
And be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors:
For the King of glory will come in.
Who is the King of glory?
Jehovah strong and mighty.
Jehovah mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Yes, lift them up, ye everlasting doors:
And the King of glory will come in.
Who is the King of glory?
Jehovah of hosts,
He is the King of glory.”

David's reign was now fully established. The Philistines, not long afterwards, were utterly discomfited. On every hand the king's power and prestige increased. But he never used his power for selfish ends. He never began a war. He never became an aggressor. He blossomed into ever more wonderful grace and character. His was and remained a shepherd heart. He began at the sheepecotes, and he never forgot. Quite frequently he unsheathed his sword, but as one challenged, provoked, defied. Other kings have sprung from their thrones and said: "Whom can we fight to-day?" David reigned in love and mercy, wondering to whom he might show kindness and truth. He always saw where another chair might be put to the banqueting table. He remained humble and benign, filial, tender, grateful, helpful—the darling of his people—the sweet singer of generations to come. His name is even now sacred to the memory of millions and millions of men.

THE END.

